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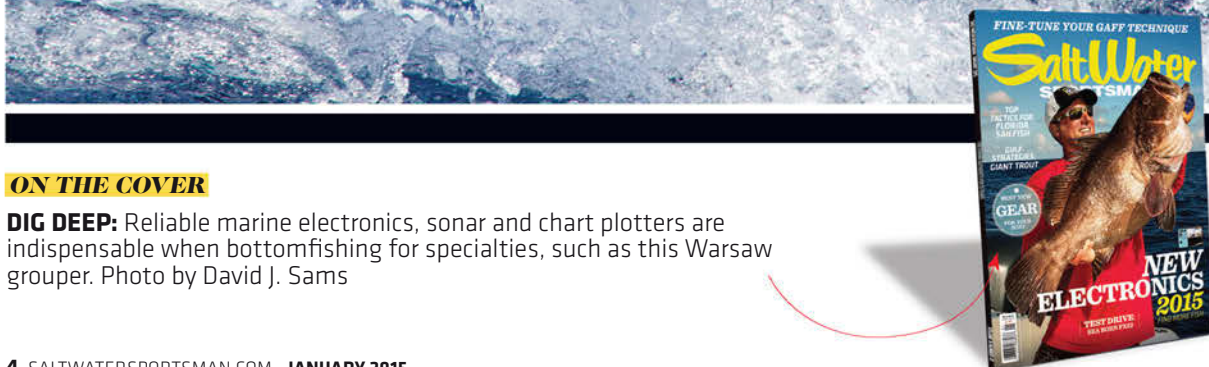
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ON THE COVER

DIG DEEP: Reliable marine electronics, sonar and chart plotters are indispensable when bottomfishing for specialties, such as this Warsaw grouper. Photo by David J. Sams



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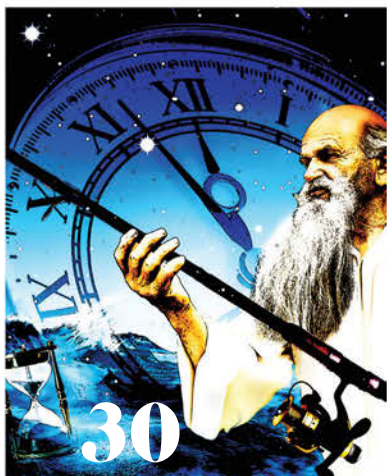
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BOAT TEST: SEA BORN FX22 TOURNAMENT

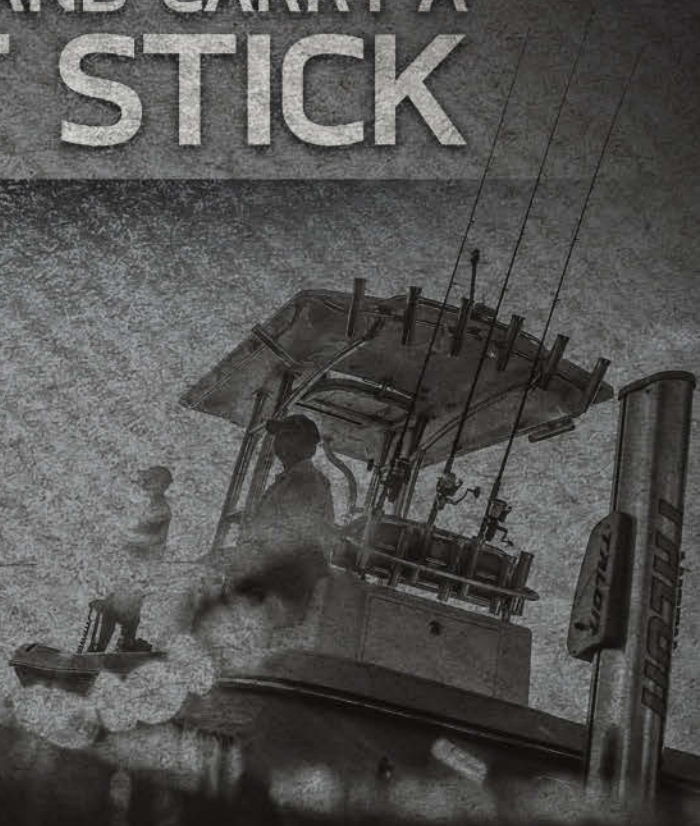


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Fair Shares



As winter and the holidays loom, so does another exciting part of the year: boat show season. This kicked off recently with the Fort Lauderdale show, and it was a doozy, with a strong showing in fishing boats, from paddle boards to giant center-consoles. By unofficial count, there was a big turnout in both exhibitors and visitors. Boat manufacturers were busy taking orders, and I heard complaints from builders struggling to keep up with the production of boats that had already been ordered. What's left of the marine industry following the recession of the last few years appears to be on its feet once again.

The enthusiasm for saltwater fishing was evident in Fort Lauderdale, which calls to mind an event I attended many moons ago, a board meeting of the American Sportfishing Association. Foremost in the minds of attendees was increasing tackle sales. What ASA president Mike Hayden, former governor of Kansas and Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, told them seemed to lack the trappings

of either an industry focus or a business strategy. In essence, he said: Make sure we have clean water and healthy ecosystems; if the water is in good shape, we'll have fish in it. And if fish are abundant, people will buy tackle to try to catch them. To steal from *Field of Dreams*, a movie about a different sport: "Build it and they will come."

There have been many changes in fishery management since that meeting years ago, many of them resulting in healthier fish stocks. In those cases, anglers did indeed show up and bought tackle ... and boats. What Hayden didn't take into account during his address was the access to those fish. So what happens when you build it and then take it away?

The Gulf of Mexico red snapper issue took a bad turn about a week before that boat show, when the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council passed Amendment 40, reserving as much as 47 percent of the recreational allotment of red snapper for charter operators. And that's to be carved out of the existing recreational allotment, not drawn from the current 51 percent reserved for commercial fishermen. So the quota for recreational anglers is essentially being cut back to about a quarter of the fishery.

If you've followed this matter over the past couple of years, you're aware of the painfully short recreational season adopted already. Sketchy stock assessments upon which the allotments are based and an evidently abundant population of snapper make for ridiculously short fishing seasons, like nine days in 2014. This year, according to observers, the recreational season will last from one to seven days, while the new charter season will run 34 days.

This kind of allotment to participants, recreational, charter and commercial, is what's known as sector separation and catch shares. That sounds slick, but what it does is turn the rights to a public resource into a commodity, shares that can be bought and sold. Unless you happen to be a recreational angler.

In this current scheme, up to 70 percent of the Gulf red snapper fishery is headed into private hands.

Sector separation and catch shares are effective tools to reduce participation in a fishery. In this case, the ones getting edged out are the recreational anglers: the people who buy fishing tackle and boats, not to mention bait, ice, gas, hotel rooms and marina services. This ruling is bad news economically, and it's bad news in terms of access to fish that belong to all of us.

The good news, if you can call it that, is the new allocation is scheduled to sunset in three years; as well, in the interim, the Gulf states may be able to wrest from the arrangement a larger role in managing red snapper fishing off their own shores. But another set of battles awaits. So as 2014 winds down and a new year begins, it's not without challenges. And inside the challenges lies the hope that, with the right effort, we may yet reclaim more equitable access to our public resources. 🍷

Glenn Law
Editor

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SNAPPER CONTRADICTION

After reading your article, “Feds Could End Recreational Red Snapper Fishing In Gulf,” (November 2014), I was inside our major south Texas grocery-chain store and ran across a freezer full of red snapper for sale to the public, all within a similar size range (12 to 13 inches). I find it difficult to understand how Texas federal water red snapper fishing is threatened with closure to recreational fishing while these juveniles are being harvested for corporate gain.

Gary Haverda
via email

SNOOK PROTOCOL

I just read my November issue and took great interest in the article on backcountry snook. I live, and fish, in that area and love to tie into over-the-slot snook. With great sadness, I saw the picture of one (page 54) being mishandled prior to release. Without the stomach being supported, that snook very likely did not live, even after what may have seemed a successful release. One less breeder to keep my habit going.

Bill Allen
via email

I am an avid snook fisherman from Florida. The picture of a fisherman holding a beautiful, trophy-class snook on page 54 of your November

issue distressed me greatly. You should NEVER hold a snook in the vertical position as depicted in the picture; it breaks a bone in their necks, which causes eventual death. I’m really surprised that no one on your staff realized this.

Vince Giaimo
Stuart, Florida

Actually, it’s holding large snook by the lower jaw that is not advisable. According to Dr. Ron Taylor, coordinator of Florida’s snook program: “Snook over 26-28 inches in length are the ones to be careful with, for it [holding them by the lower jaw] can rupture the isthmus, the connection between the lower jaw and the body. Simply hold big snook by the gill covering and the tail with wet hands and take your picture.”
—Ed.

CRUSTACEAN FANS

I couldn’t agree with you more, Pammy Brown: There has been a grave injustice toward certain types of saltwater creatures. I also believe the editors of *Salt Water Sportsman* should reconfigure the name of their magazine to “*Salt Water Dummies*.”

I would gladly pre-purchase a Marine Debris Programrest-of-my-life subscription to *Salt Water Sportswoman* should you decide to grace the pages with photos of anything you catch, including a cold.

In fact, I would gladly pay double the subscription rate and drop my subscriptions to all other fishing magazines like bad habits. You sure have a huge fan base here, so please keep sending in photos. We can only hope the editors will go buy some reading glasses.

Ed Stewart
San Clemente, California

Crustacean discrimination? I think she (Pammy Brown) qualifies. I just hope that she sends more pictures. It helps your magazine. The guy with the Virginia Tech cap on the October cover helps, too! Keep up the good work,

Aubrey “Butch” Evans III
Lynchburg, Virginia

FISH BABES ONLINE

Some of these ladies are holding grouper, which are now an endangered species. Shame on you. You should be more environmentally concerned. Ashamed of your magazine.

Joe Cayman
California/Cayman Islands

DROP US A LINE Got a piece of good news to share? Want to gripe? Like to see your thoughts on the pages of *Salt Water Sportsman*? Send your letters, manuscripts and any relevant comments to editor@saltwatersportsman.com or via U.S. mail: SWS Editor, 460 N. Orlando Ave., Suite 200, Winter Park, FL 32789. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed but will not be acknowledged or returned unless accompanied by an SASE. We are not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or photographs.

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MAKE 'EM BITE

I just received your latest issue: You're kidding, right? I never thought your product could be so thin. On the south shore of Long Island, striped bass and blackfish are in full swing, but your magazine offers nothing new to catch these fish. At 54, I've fished since I was a kid: different tactics to live line bunker to catch more striped bass or jigging for blackfish. I fish in the

Atlantic Ocean. It's a large area to cover. A little help would be nice. I don't need to ask where to find them, but how to make them bite! If you can't get the ads for your publication, add more articles to incentivize our reading. Give us new stuff, not the same old stuff. Or am I that old and salty?

*John Kampa
via email*



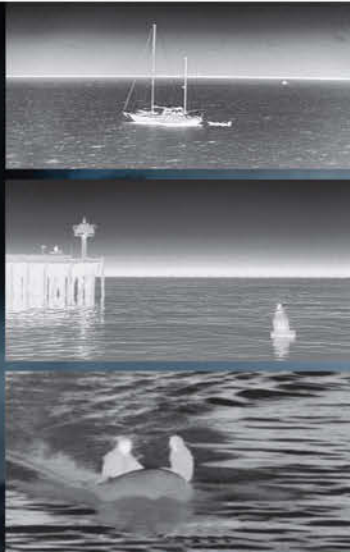
SUPER SNOOK

Angler Mark Dunnam reeled in this 46-inch snook caught on a cut pinfish during a fishing trip in Tampa Bay, Florida.



CONNECTICUT STRIPER

Tucker Kane with his father, Tim, boated this striper while fishing in Long Island Sound off the coast of Westbrook, Connecticut. The fish bit a live bunker fished on the surface at the mouth of the Connecticut River, and it weighed in at 42 pounds.



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SWS EDITOR AMONG HONORED CONSERVATIONISTS

The Billfish Foundation recognized three conservationist anglers with the Rybovich Lifetime Conservation Award, TBF's most prestigious, at its annual fundraising banquet in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in November, and *Salt Water Sportsman* shared in the honors.

Named after John Rybovich, pioneer in billfish conservation and sport-fishing boat design, the Rybovich Lifetime



WELL-DESERVED: TBF board member John Brownlee, right, presents Rip Cunningham with the Rybovich Lifetime Conservation Award.

Conservation Award is presented to individuals who have exhibited a long and successful commitment to billfish conservation.

2014 recipients are C.M. "Rip" Cunningham of Boston; Dr. Julian Pepperell of Queensland,

Australia; and Herman "Dutch" Prager of Mandeville, Louisiana.

Cunningham has been involved in many aspects of saltwater fisheries conservation. His service includes nine years on the New England Fishery Management Council, where he also served as chairman. A name synonymous with *Salt Water Sportsman*, Cunningham began his career at the magazine 41 years ago as associate editor, rose to editor-in-chief, publisher and eventually co-owner. He left full-time employment in 2004, but he continues to serve as *SWS*'s conservation editor, shedding light on important issues and bringing a familiar voice to readers with his monthly column.

Fellow Rybovich award recipient Pepperell established the first game-fish tagging program for the New South Wales Fisheries Ministry 40 years ago, helping Australia's sport-fishing community transition from a kill tradition to a tag-and-release ethic. An adjunct professor at several universities, he is widely published in both the academic and popular press.

Also honored, Prager is a founder of the New Orleans Big Game Fishing Club, established in 1961 with the purpose of exploring the Gulf of Mexico's big-game fishing and furthering scientific knowledge of game species. As president from 1962 to 1990, he carried on the club's mission of serving as liaison between anglers and the scientific community.

THE NEW PATHFINDERS.



GULF ANGLERS TO SPLIT RED SNAPPER QUOTA WITH CHARTER BOATS

In a move opposed by recreational anglers and the sport-fishing industry, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council recently voted 10-7 to approve Amendment 40, which will divide the recreational red snapper quota between individual recreational fishermen and charter/for-hire captains.

"This move is not based in sound science or good economics. It is an effort to Band-Aid a poor federal fisheries management system needing major surgery," said Maverick Boats president Scott Deal, who is the co-chair of the Commission on Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Management.

"We in the tackle industry don't see Amendment 40 as being in the best interests of the entire recreational fishing community," said Gary Zurn, senior vice president of marketing for Big Rock Sports, a fishing tackle wholesaler. "We know it will have a significant financial impact on the coastal communities and businesses throughout the Gulf that support recreational fishing."

A small glimmer of hope for the future of recreational management of Gulf red snapper was provided by a last-minute attachment to Amendment 40 that requires a three-year sunset, which means that unless the Council takes action to continue sector separation, it will expire after three years. While sector separation is now scheduled to go into effect for up to the next three years, the sunset provision stops any forward movement on bringing catch

shares into the temporarily separated recreational sectors and prevents a permanent implementation strategy.

In addition, the five Gulf states (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida) agreed on a path forward for regional management, formally known as Amendment 39, that would give each one control over the recreational fishery off its coast, in both state and federal waters, in a way that better meets the needs of the recreational fishing community.

The states' big stumbling block was how to divide the allowable catch among the states. However, the states agreed to an allocation formula during the meeting, as well as a timing strategy for implementation. This gives Gulf states a strong incentive to agree upon a regional management structure by the time that sector separation expires.

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NOAA SHEDS LIGHT ON DERELICT FISH TRAPS

Thousands of fishing traps are lost or abandoned each year in U.S. waters and become what are known as derelict traps. These traps result in losses to habitat and fisheries, losses that are largely preventable, according to a new

NOAA study recently published in the Marine Pollution Bulletin.

The report, the first to examine the derelict fish-trap problem and so-called “ghost fishing” nationally, takes into account the results of seven NOAA-funded studies in different fisheries across the United States: the Dungeness



crab fisheries in Alaska and Puget Sound; the blue crab fisheries in Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina; the spiny lobster fishery in Florida; and the coral reef fish fishery in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It also compares the severity of the problem and common management challenges across the regions, and it reports important findings, such as estimates of derelict trap numbers and how long they remain in the environment.

“Before this report, the marine debris community lacked comparable data on derelict traps,” said Courtney Arthur, research specialist for NOAA’s Marine Debris Program and lead author of the study. “We had different pieces of information, but not a whole picture. This paper connects those pieces and identifies areas where we need to focus our efforts.”

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FEDS WITHDRAW PROPOSAL TO LIMIT WEAKFISH FISHERY

NMFS recently withdrew a proposed rule to set the recreational possession limit at one fish per person per day or trip for weakfish (*Cynoscion regalis*) caught in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and impose a 100-pound per day or trip commercial possession limit. The intent of the proposed rule was to modify regulations for the Atlantic coastal stock of weakfish to be more compatible with Addendum IV to Amendment 4 of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s Interstate Fishery Management Plan (ISFMP). The Commission concluded that existing federal regulations are conservationally equivalent to state regulations, so changes to the current EEZ regulations are no longer needed.



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INSHORE EXPERT

Jimmy Cirillo, 12 Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Jimmy began fishing before the age of 2 in bays and channels around Long Beach Island, New Jersey, and he remembers how his dad attached the Zebco rod to his wrist with a Velcro strap so that he couldn't lose it. His first catch was a fluke, no pun intended, like this 18-incher he caught last summer.



MANHATTAN PIONEER

Max Polsky, 12 New York, New York

Max, a Manhattan resident, spotted this 13-pound mahi circling a lobster pot and dropped a jig down to catch it. The fish was hooked just 12 miles off Montauk Point at the end of Long Island, New York. He couldn't believe that it was even possible to land a mahi in New York.



SHARK EXPEDITIONIST

Kayla Osiecki, 13 Suffolk, Virginia

Kayla has been an avid blue-water angler for more than six years. She loves to learn about sharks, and she travels from her home in Virginia to shark fish out of Ocean City, Maryland. She enjoys teaching others her discoveries on these intriguing predators.



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Choose right and bring more fish over the gunwale.

BY **GEORGE POVEROMO**

MAKE NO MISTAKE, HARRY VERNON III IS AN EXPERT AT GAFFING FISH. HOWEVER, THE DAY HE AND I TOOK A MUTUAL FRIEND FISHING OFF POMPANO BEACH, FLORIDA, AND I PLAYED A COBIA TO THE BOAT, YOU WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT WAS HIS FIRST-EVER GAFFING EXPERIENCE. ARMED WITH AN 8-FOOT GAFF WITH A 4-INCH HOOK, HARRY INITIALLY MISSED THE FISH. HIS SECOND ATTEMPT PROVED WORSE: HE STUCK THE COBIA, ONLY TO HAVE IT SHAKE FREE. ON HIS THIRD TRY, WHEN HE FINALLY GAFFED AND LIFTED THE FISH OUT OF THE WATER, THE POINT OF THE GAFF PROTRUDING FROM THE FISH STUCK IN MY RUB RAIL. SOMEHOW WE STILL MANAGED TO PULL THE 43-POUND COBIA THRASHING ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE GUNWALE INTO THE BOAT. AS EXPECTED, HARRY BLAMED THE GAFF, CLAIMING IT WAS WAY TOO LARGE FOR THE TASK. "IT WORKED, DIDN'T IT?" WAS MY LIGHTHEARTED REBUTTAL.

KEYS TO BETTER GAFFING

1. Lead a fish to gaff by keeping the boat straight and barely underway. This prompts the fish to swim with the boat and come within easy reach.
2. Never attempt to gaff a fish in front of the leader or fishing line. If you miss and the fish charges off, the gaff could tangle or break the line.
3. Use wind-on leaders whenever possible. They promote a consistent fighting rhythm that leads a fish to gaff without interruptions or changes in pressure.
4. Sink the gaff in the upper shoulder area, a tad behind the gill plates, if you can. This renders full control of the fish and won't damage the meat.
5. To gaff spiraling fish, like tuna, take your shot when the fish heads back toward the boat, extending the gaff across and into its upper dorsal region, but always behind the leader.
6. With bottomfish you plan to take home for supper, slip the gaff hook under their lower jaw or into their mouth to keep the meat intact.
7. Lift a gaffed fish from the water and swing it into the boat in a single move, trying not to pause between one and the other.
8. If you boat a fish that's still green, pin it to the deck or nearest gunwale with the gaff still in it. Once subdued, transport the fish to the fish box without delay.
9. For safety reasons, keep all gaffs stored until needed.
10. If a gaff is kept on deck, add a protective barrier over the point, such as a tennis ball. Should someone come in contact with the gaff or should it fall from the T-top, the ball will prevent an injury.



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Vernon did have a point — pun intended — but instead of digging out my smaller gaff from an in-deck compartment, I directed him to the big one under the gunwale, reserved for large dolphin, wahoo and yellowfin tuna. Admittedly, a lighter gaff equipped with a smaller hook — say, one with a 2-inch gap — would have proven more efficient on that cobia and also easier to handle. Nevertheless, scaling down the size of a gaff can prove risky if you don't know what to look for in terms of quality, design and construction prior to purchase. When dealing with big fish, an uneducated choice could result in straightening or pulling out the gaff hook or bending the shaft.

Unplanned Testing

Leeward Rods, a top custom rod builder based in Miami, also builds custom gaffs. Albert Castro, the owner, admits to having an eye-opening experience in the Bahamas this past April. “We were catching 60- to 90-pound yellowfins, and the crew I was with somehow managed to lose not one but two standard 8-foot gaffs with large gap hooks on these fish,” reports Castro. “We had no more gaffs other than a pick gaff with a 2-inch hook, which surely was going to be useless for anything beyond school dolphin and picking up dock lines. Afterward, however, we were all impressed of how well that small hook penetrated and held in those large tuna and also how easy it was to lift the fish into the boat. It



RIGHT CHOICE: Match the gaff hook size to the target to secure and boat the fish with ease. Left, square gaff hooks offer extra strength and knurled shafts add security.

GEORGE POVEROMO (2)



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certainly changed some of my thinking on gaff building.”

Much like the theory that heavy tackle and big hooks are necessary to catch big game, Castro reasons that needing a large gaff hook to subdue a big fish is a misconception. “Around 90 percent of our offshore fish can be handled with a 2-inch gap hook,” says Castro. “For those overly large, like giant wahoo and tunas well over 100 pounds, a 3-inch gap should be fine.” When downsizing to a smaller gap hook and a reduced diameter shaft, Castro says it’s crucial to consider the length of the gaff and, of course, the caliber of its components.

Hip to Go Square

Despite their odd look, square gaff hooks are growing in popularity. Castro says they are unparalleled in strength and reliability. “I use Winthrop hooks on my gaffs, in 2-, 3- and 4-inch sizes. Their sides are flattened, as opposed to round. This increases their strength and resistance to straightening, and their semi-square, dipper-style design seems to lock and hold a fish better. They’re also stainless steel, so rust is a nonissue,” explains Castro. “I had a machine shop make small gap, round gaff hooks for me, but I straightened a few. So now, I’m exclusively using the Winthrop hooks. The abuse they can withstand for their size is impressive.”

Built for Abuse

Top-shelf gaffs come with hefty price tags, and, as with most things, you get what you pay for. When fishing in my late teens, I broke a wooden gaff handle, straightened a few gaff hooks and even had one pull from its shaft. So I learned early on to forgo those attractive prices and, instead, save up to buy the best.

AFTCO is a leader in quality gaffs, offering top aluminum and fiberglass models. Their hooks are forged from stainless-steel rods, and both their marine aluminum and fiberglass shafts are swaged to prevent the hook from pulling free and enhances

each gaff's overall strength and performance.

Castro's gaff shafts are also swaged, and the base of his stainless-steel hook shanks are knurled. The grooves created by the latter enable a thorough distribution of epoxy when joining hook and shaft. That welds the hook in place, basically, and, in conjunction with the swaged shaft, prevents it from turning or pulling free.

Quality gaffs, by the way, also come with protective butt caps, which hold firmly — without banging or spinning — when you put a gaff in a rod holder. They also guard against chipping the boat's gelcoat, scratching the teak or hurting someone with the end of the shaft.

Get a Grip

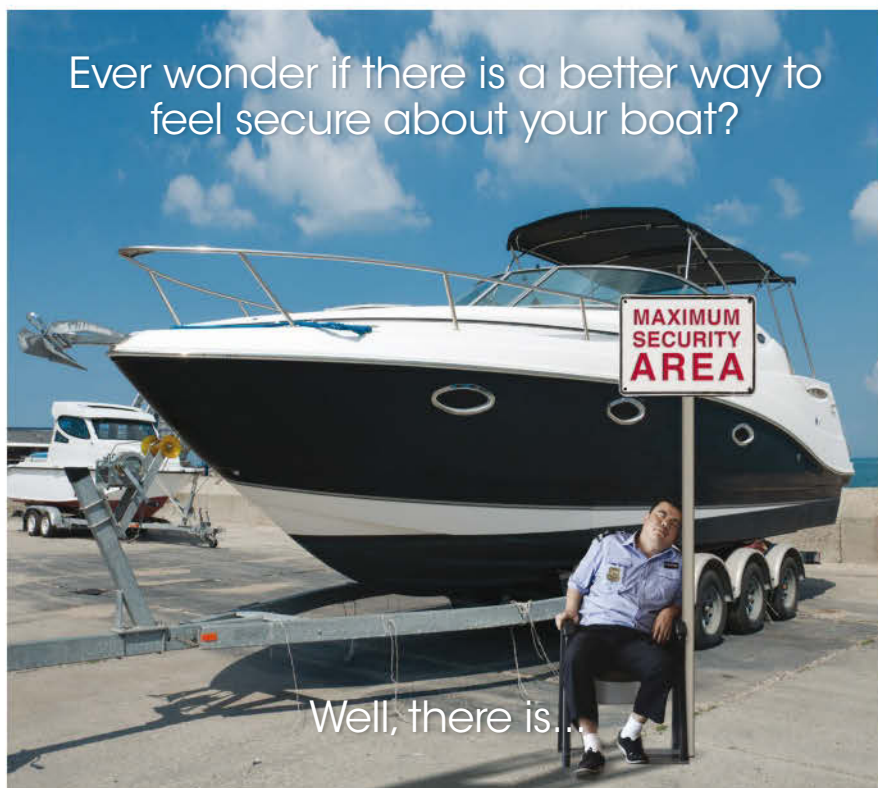
Grips strategically placed along the shaft of a gaff minimize slippage from wet or sunscreen-slickened hands, and they are a big help when hanging on to a green fish and lifting it into the boat. Grips at the upper third of a shaft provide control when reaching out and planting the gaff. However, a choker grip 18 inches or so above the hook provides a firm grasp on the lower part of the shaft, generating both the stability and leverage needed to lift a heavy fish from the water and swing it into the boat. With that in mind, the choker grips on Castro's custom gaffs incorporate 3M Anti-Slip Tape.

Lengthy Discussion

For the record conscious, a gaff cannot exceed 8 feet in length to be IGFA legal. Naturally, an 8-footer is better aboard big boats that do a lot of trolling and leadering of pelagics or bottomfishing with long leaders. On small and midsize craft with retracted outriggers, a long gaff could interfere with the rigging when lifting a fish into the boat. It has happened to me on more than one occasion. So mind the angle of the gaff handle during the upswing to avoid this or consider shorter lengths. For school fish, 4- and 6-footers are adequate.

Flexibility, to a small degree, is also advantageous. For many anglers, the ideal gaff is stiff enough to plant its hook effectively, but it has a tad of flexibility to help generate momentum when lifting a fish from the water. That bit of flexibility, inherent in composite and fiberglass gaffs, also absorbs some of the shocks caused by a thrashing fish, helping to maintain control of it.

Like most marine gear and fishing tackle, gaff technology is advancing, too. Now, lighter, thinner diameter shafts and smaller and odd-shaped hooks make gaffing more effortless and efficient. Naturally, shafts become larger in diameter and sturdier as we go up the size ladder. Aboard my center console, I carry one 4-footer, two 6-footers and two 8-footers. You might not need such a selection, but make sure you have the right gaff for the intended purpose. Bottom line: The fish won't know what hit them! 🐟



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Retrofit Season

Winter is the perfect time to add new accessories to the boat.

| BY CAPT. DAVE LEAR |

In fishing, timing is everything. Being at the right spot at just the right moment can be the difference between going fishing or going for a boat ride. When opportunity arises, having the right stuff properly organized aboard is equally important. So now that the slower winter months are upon us, take advantage of the downtime to tweak your craft by adding some new accessories. To jump-start the project list, here is some cool stuff that'll make the upcoming season more productive and enjoyable.

Upgrade your boat with the latest equipment, so you'll be ready when the fish are biting.



Cooler Shield Hinges

Face it: Plastic coolers, particularly the hinges, take a beating on boats. But instead of tossing a damaged cooler into the recycling bin, Cooler Shield Hinges (\$14.99; coolerhinge.com) now give it new life. The hinges are designed to rest against each other at the optimal angle when the lid is open. Components include 316 stainless-steel pins and screws, and the heavy-duty Delrin material is self-lubricating, UV- and corrosion-resistant and food safe. Cooler Shield Hinges retrofit a number of cooler makes and models, and they come with a lifetime warranty.



Rigid Industries LED Spreader Lights

With less power consumption, better dependability and brighter illumination, why would anyone choose incandescent lights over LEDs, right? Exactly! Rigid Industries now makes a full line of LED lights for marine applications, including the compact SR-M spreader lights (\$109.99; rigidindustries.com). With a 60-degree diffused pattern and a 50,000-plus hour lifespan, these lights illuminate the cockpit like a concert stage

Shimano CM-1000 Sport Camera

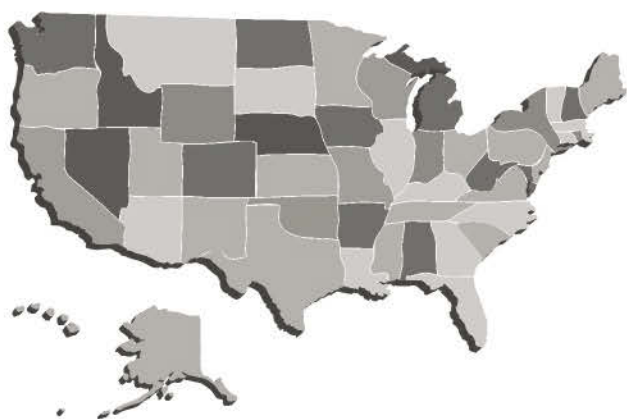
In this age of social media and instant messaging, sharing a fish tale requires more than hyperbole. High-definition images add zip and proof to your posts. The CM-1000 from Shimano (\$299.99; shimano-sportcamera.com) lets anglers capture on-the-water moments in high-resolution stills and video. The f/2 lens provides outstanding low-light performance, while the 16-megapixel CMOS image sensor enables 1080p HD video. Featuring 135-degree and super-wide 180-degree modes, the auto image rotation allows you to flip the camera while maintaining a horizontal image plane. Wi-Fi connectivity and smartphone/app friendly, the CM-1000 is capable of live views, video playback, remote adjustment settings and shot framing. The unit is smaller than a deck of cards, and the IPX8 is waterproof rated to 30 feet.





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while drawing a meager 0.72 amps. The beam extends more than 62 meters. Featuring integral hybrid optics, the lens and reflector combination captures the maximum light emitted and projects it exactly where it's needed most. A powder-coated aluminum housing and a sealed polycarbonate lens ensure long service in the harsh marine environment.

Leaf Marine DC Air Conditioner

Anglers with older boats lacking a generator no longer have to be uncomfortable when the temperature climbs. The Leaf Marine LM8000 (starting at \$8,000; leafmarine.com) is an innovative air-conditioning unit that operates on customizable direct current from 12 to 48 volts. The lightweight, compact design offers dual-zone air-conditioned comfort and reverse cycle heat, and it has a capacity of up to 4,000 BTU. An optional chiller plate can be added without needing a condenser and evaporator. The organic ION battery in the power module is noncombustible, it will not develop a memory and produces 100 amps per hour without dropping off. The module's built-in management system also protects against complete depletion. Stainless-steel construction and military-grade components and connections add to the system's reliability. With

ELECTRIC OPTION:

Bennett, long a leader in hydraulic trim tabs, now offers a redesigned electrical series.

DUAL USE:

Frigibar's heavy-duty dry-storage boxes are rustproof and double as extra seating.

its easy plug-and-play installation, quiet operation and a two-year warranty, the LM8000 will enhance the boating experience in your favorite ride.

Frigibar Salty Dog Storage Boxes

One of the age-old truisms in boating is that you never have enough storage. But Frigibar offers a simple, rustproof solution for most stowage needs. The new E-Series Salty Dog deck and dock boxes provide convenient storage units in four different sizes, including 38-, 50-, 60- and 80-inch lengths. All versions measure 20 inches wide and 17½ inches high. With all-fiberglass construction, these rugged containers feature a hard, smooth exterior finish

with a matte-white interior. E-Series Salty Dog deck and dock boxes (starting at \$590; frigibar.com) also boost seating capacity with the optional 3-inch removable cushion.

Bennett Electric Trim Tabs

Bennett, the longtime hydraulic trim tab maker (and inventor of the first electric tabs in 1960) is adding juice to its fluid lineup. The company now offers the Bolt Electric System (prices vary by size; a 12-by-9-inch set starts at \$640; bennetttrimtabs.com) for trailer boats from 17 to 28 feet in length. The system's robust design includes a watertight nylon actuator with the main seal positioned up high for protection against marine growth and water intrusion. The wiring remains secure and protected, concealed through the upper hinge, which does not have to be disassembled for installation. These tabs produce minimal operating noise, the planes are 304-grade stainless steel, and a five-year warranty backs every system. Bolt tabs come with a choice of three controls, including two with the automatic tab-retraction feature.

COOL DOWN: Leaf Marine's light and compact DC air-conditioner is sized to provide cool comfort in older or smaller boats.





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Almost Alive Outrigger Teaser Reels

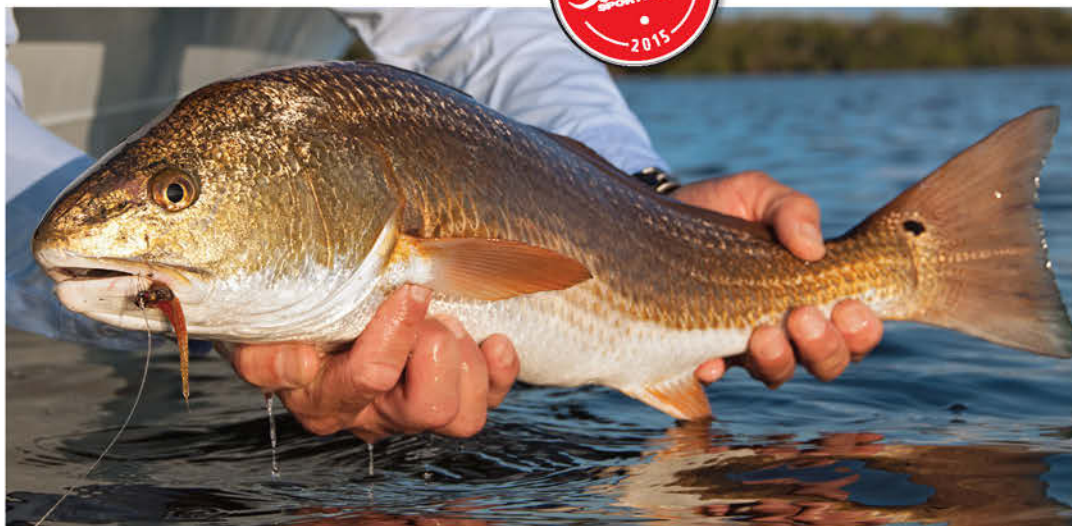
When a hot fish strikes, the last thing you need is trouble clearing other lines. Almost Alive outrigger teaser reels (\$279.95; almostalive.lures.com) solve that problem and add a stylish, modern look to the boat as well. Built on an anodized-aluminum frame and 8-inch spool, these reels come in flat or rail-mount models, which fit tubing up to one inch in diameter. Both include a large ergonomic drag knob, as well as adjustable drag setting and quick drag lock.



EASIER SYSTEMS: Top, Almost Alive teaser reel features fast pickup and adjustable drag. Right, simple, removable drink holders from Accon.

Accon Marine Removable Drink Holders

On those days when the boat isn't cutting through the water like a hot knife through butter, it's nice to keep cups, cans and bottles securely in place so the contents won't spill all over the console or deck. Accon Marine's Drink Holders (aluminum, \$62.36; stainless, \$78.52; acconmarine.com) help keep the boat shipshape. Available in single and double configurations in either aluminum or stainless steel, these holders measure 3 1/2 inches in diameter to fit most standard beverage containers. The stainless-steel base mounts on any flat surface, eliminating the need for cutouts. The base fastens with two number 10 screws, and the holders can be removed when not in use. 🌀



FISH OR FOUL:

Weed guards can be the difference between hooking fish or fouling.

GUARDS ON DUTY:

- [1]** On a Bendback, the hook point rides up and the wing of the fly acts as a guard, shielding it.
- [2]** A double mono post weed guard is popular on shallow water patterns.
- [3]** A single mono or braided wire post can be added easily to most store-bought poppers.
- [4]** The mono loop is great for heavy grass, but can only be attached properly during fly-tying.

DAVID MCCLEAF

En Garde!

Catch more fish and fewer snags with weed guards.

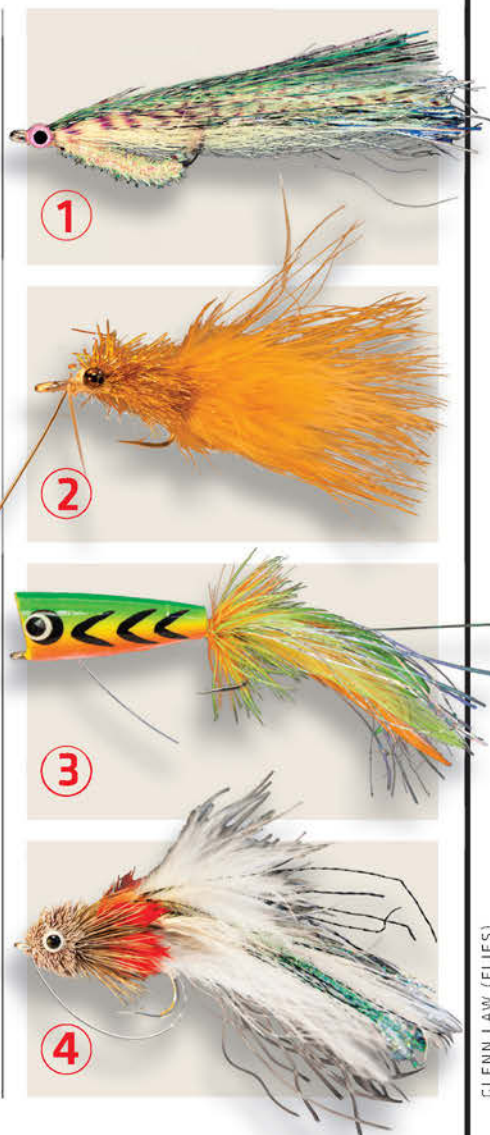
BY ED JAWOROWSKI

Whether you fish for seatrout, snook, striped bass or redfish, certain locales and situations call for flies that prevent fouling on grass, rocks and such. They accomplish this through their basic design or by the addition of devices that protect the hook points, commonly referred to as “weed guards” — I’ll call them hook guards or simply guards. Their function is to avoid fouling or snagging on floating or rooted weeds, oyster beds, coral, rocks, wood, even bottom sand. Whether you tie them yourself, have someone tie them for you, or you buy them ready-made, adding a few of these flies to your arsenal is sure to improve your fishing.

Virtually every bonefish fly rides with the hook point up, providing reasonable freedom from snagging. Similarly, flies weighted with bead chain or lead eyes — such as Crazy Charlies and

Clouser Minnows and Coneheads, like Jiggies — also ride hook point up and are moderately foul-proof. It’s important to realize that all of these flies rely more on wing material than the added weight to orient them. The buoyancy of the bucktail or other hair orients the hook point up when it hits the water. In fact, a lot of hair tied above the shank, facing away from the bend, can actually counteract the weight of the heavy eyes and cause a Crazy Charlie or Clouser to flip over and ride with the hook point down. So be sure to tie the material on the inside of the bend, not all around the shank.

A variation of this design, the Bendback, should be a staple in the fly box of every inshore fisherman. It features a slightly bent shank, which puts some of the weight of the bend below the front part of the hook shank, acting like a keel. To further enhance this feature, I make a few wraps of wire around the shank, near the bend, and coat them



CLENN LAW (FLIES)

with epoxy. Holding the hook behind the eye with pliers, I grasp the bend and pull down on it slightly to produce a soft curve in the shank, not a sharp angle, that keeps the hook point well exposed for hooking. As with bonefish flies, all wing material on Bendbacks is tied on the inside of the bend of the hook to keep the point riding upward.

All of the fly types mentioned afford reasonable hook protection as they slide through grass and bump over solid obstructions, but flies with added hook guards offer greater snag protection. Most such guards are made of monofilament or wire, single strand or braided. Keep in mind, however, that the purpose of a hook guard is to move the fly, not the obstacle. After all, no guard will push aside a rock, branch or coral. You simply want the fly to deflect around or over the obstruction. And don't worry about missing strikes; most saltwater

fish have powerful crushing jaws, and hook guards collapse under their pressure without hindering the hook-set.

If you tie your own flies, you can just make a loop (or two) of mono, tie the strands in along the shank and let them protrude out the back. When the fly is complete, just pull the strands around the hook bend and tie off on the underside of the head. You can also opt to add a straight piece (or two) of single-strand or braided wire just before whipping the head. Bend the wire so it extends just past the hook point at a 45-degree angle. You can even add guards to hard body poppers that you purchase. Heat a bodkin and sear a hole in the bottom of the foam body. Dip the end of a stiff piece of mono or braided wire into quick-dry epoxy and insert it in the hole.

Finally, there's an ingenious guard that fly-tying guru Bob Popovics came up with. He added it to one of his

Siliclone patterns, a fly tied Bendback style. Tie in a small bunch of bucktail behind the eye of the hook and coat it with regular household silicone to form a spike. Then trim it just past the hook point. The result is a springy, rubber guard that works amazingly well. 🎣



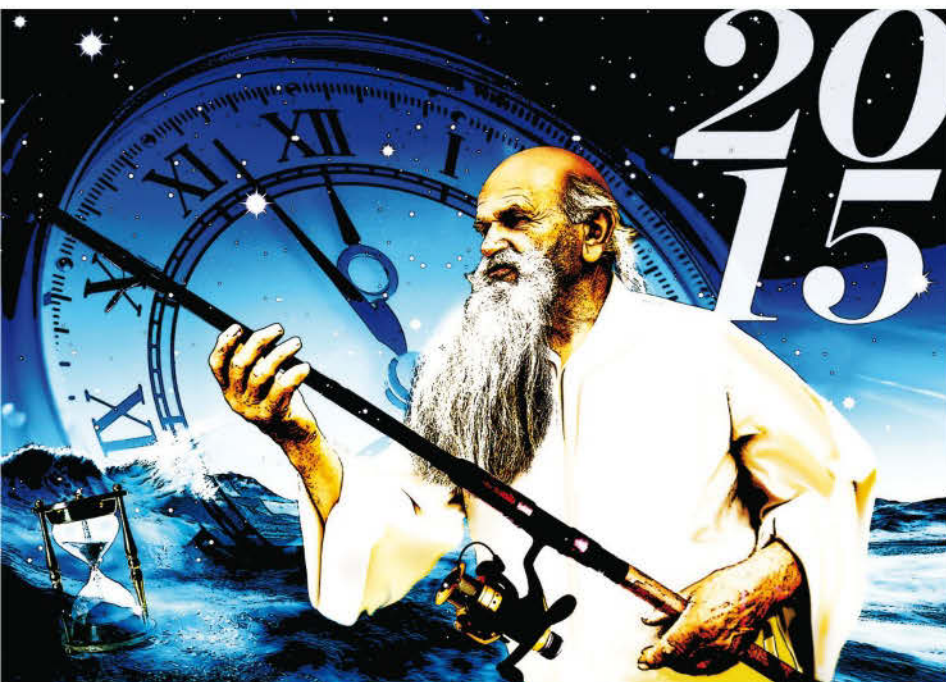
ED JAWOROWSKI is a writer, photographer and lecturer who has fly-fished much of the western hemisphere. His four books and hundreds of his articles have been published in the U.S., Europe and Japan. A Classical Studies professor and chairman at Villanova University for over 40 years, he now serves as fly gear design advisor for Temple Fork Outfitters.

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Looking Ahead

Some realistic thoughts on the promise of a new year.

BY RIP CUNNINGHAM

BECAUSE OF THE PRODUCTION SCHEDULE OF PRINT MAGAZINES, THIS IS BEING WRITTEN WELL IN ADVANCE OF PUBLICATION. IN A WORLD OF INSTANT INFORMATION AT EVERY LEVEL, IT IS SOMETHING OF A DISCONNECT. BUT IT IS THE WORLD I HAVE LIVED IN FOR MOST OF MY ADULT LIFE AND APPARENTLY STILL DO. SO, I AM GOING TO DO SOMETHING THAT WAS ALMOST STANDARD FARE BACK IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF SWS AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH NEW YEAR: I WILL PREDICT SOME EVENTS FOR 2015.

In last month's column, I touched on the topic of Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA) re-authorization. While this might come under the heading of "wishful thinking," I am going to say that a new Congress, without the leadership of Doc Hastings on the House Committee on Natural Resources, will not push forward the Strengthening Fishing Communities

and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act. If action is taken, it will be a modified effort. We can hope that it will include some actions to make MSA more effective at managing in a way that will positively impact recreational fisheries.

Coming out of last year's second iteration of the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Summit was the commitment by NOAA Fisheries to craft a

National Recreational Fisheries Policy. Efforts are underway to accomplish this task, and I predict that it will be done early in 2015 and moved into the implementation phase. My feeling is that much of what this policy will focus on has been outlined in the Morris-Deal Commission's "Vision for Managing America's Saltwater Recreational Fisheries," such as a revised approach to managing recreational fisheries; allocating marine fisheries for the greatest benefit to the nation; managing for the forage base; and codifying a process for cooperative management. All of these final recommendations will come through the Secretary of Commerce's Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee and its Recreational Fisheries Working Group.

Staying at the federal level, the recreational fishing industry should see implementation of some of the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). This has been a slow process that many of us thought would be in place years ago. While there have been some improvements in the data collection program, it has largely been the old Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) program in MRIP clothing. While MRIP will by no means be complete in 2015, it will be a step or two closer to completion. The industry needs to have this in place to allow fisheries managers to make decisions that will benefit the resources and the recreational fishing industry and community.

I do not think that the level of distrust that developed between some factions in the recreational community and the environmental nongovernmental organizations as a whole will disappear in 2015. Nevertheless, I believe that having it do so would be beneficial. Our communities are largely on the same side on a number of issues, and working together where we agree would likely get better results. That does not mean that our communities will agree on every issue, but at least we should agree to disagree. From



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my own standpoint, I do not believe that all ENGOs want to eliminate recreational fishing. Most are interested in the long-term sustainability of our common-property resources, which means some sacrifices must be made by all user groups.

On a more local level, I don't think that we will see any improvement in the striped bass population. I believe that continued decline in the spawning-stock biomass has been written in stone. Even if this year's Young-of-the-Year index is way off the charts on the upside, we have a number of very poor to disastrous years of potential recruitment, with 2011 as an exception, to work through the system. I am not sure that we will see the highs of 2006 ever again in my lifetime. Too bad — it was kinda fun, and it was great for the recreational fishing industry. The West Coast

population of striped bass is also in trouble, due more to environmental problems than overfishing. I also predict a continuation of the severely

■
My intent is not to be negative, but to give a realistic idea that we will continue to face complicated problems.

depressed state of the Northeast groundfish stocks. It is likely that we have gone past the vaguely defined tipping point where the population loses its ability to rebound. Certainly, some of that decline is environmental,

but it is also the result of chronic overfishing. I would not be surprised to see a moratorium in the very near future. How that might be implemented, I am at a loss to say.

Summer flounder or fluke along the Atlantic coast will continue to expand their presence. Along the Gulf Coast, red snapper should also see their spawning stock grow, but how the issue of sector separation and state management play into this fishery will take a long while to resolve. What will happen to the individual angler in this fishery is the biggest question.

My intent is not to be negative, but to give a realistic idea that we will continue to face some complicated problems. They are not unsolvable, but they will take a common effort from all the user groups to make sure that recreational fishing remains a viable and vibrant part of our coastal communities. 🐟

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2015 Model Year, Robalo N.A.P. No Hagggle Reel Deal pricing does not include options, dealer prep, freight charges, fees for dealer installation of options, taxes, title, registration, documentation and licensing may vary by location and are in addition to prices shown. Photos may show optional equipment. Some equipment or engines offered may not be available in some states or require additional equipment at an added cost. See your dealer for details.



1. ROLLER RELEASE

While getting ready to head out to catch Spanish mackerel in Tampa Bay, Florida, I couldn't find my dehooker. Since jacks and ladyfish are often mixed in with the mackerel schools, a quick release is a must to get right back into the action without wasting any time. In the garage, I noticed a 4-inch paint roller, and by just bending down the shaft, a new dehooker was ready. Be sure to leave a small gap between the point and the shaft in order to catch the line. Once the bend of the hook catches the dehooker, hold the leader tight. And with just one shake, the unwanted fish is gone.

*Rick and Will Jones
Tampa, Florida*

2. ROD SAVER

We often catch redfish right off our floating dock and have lost a couple of rods when guests laid them down to grab something and big reds pulled the rods into the water. I wanted to install rod holders but had a hard time finding any that were tall enough for easy rod placement, could move with the dock and would not obstruct boats. I couldn't mount them to the pilings as they would be inaccessible at low tide. My neighbor Dick came up with a great idea. He turned a toilet flange upside down and screwed it to the dock, then constructed rod holders from PVC pipes using the upside-down flange as an anchor point. The PVC pipes fit snugly on the flange and stay put without adhesive, so the rod holders are easy to remove when not in use.

*Mitch Grunsky
McClellanville, South Carolina*



3. PLIERS INSURANCE

If you have an old cellphone car charger lying around, put it to use as a coil lanyard for fishing pliers. Simply cut off the plugs, then crimp one end of the cord to the holster and the other to a clip that fastens to the pliers. This project is practical and also a great way to recycle an otherwise useless item.

*Darrell L. Smith
Fort Pierce, Florida*



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Guy Harvey
Marine Wildlife Artist, Biologist, Diver, and Angler



GUY HARVEY

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- I DO support a path to connect kids with the outdoors; to become anglers and stewards of the resource.

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OF FLORIDA

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featuring
George Poveromo



Salt Water SPORTSMAN

NATIONAL SEMINAR SERIES

Learn top angling strategies and check out the gear used by the pros at a town near you.

Saltwater angling's heavy hitters are set to divulge their secrets for success as the highly acclaimed *Salt Water Sportsman* National Seminar Series kicks off its 2015 tour. Find out where, when and how to connect with your favorite inshore, nearshore and offshore species, and learn key strategies the pros use

to catch trophy fish in your area. Top baits, lures and tackle will be revealed, along with step-by-step rigging instructions. Don't miss your chance to boost your fishing IQ.

Wealth of Knowledge

Twenty-eight years after its inception, the National Seminar Series is the nation's most popular educational course on recreational marine fishing tactics, as well as the longest running. Whether you are a novice, intermediate or highly experienced saltwater angler, you are sure to learn valuable information to help you

improve your fishing skills and ultimately score more fish.

A minimum of 10 faculty members will be present at each location. Faculty teams comprising *Salt Water Sportsman* editors, noted national fishing authorities and top local guides and pros will share in explicit detail their expertise on a number of fishing-related subjects, including popular and cutting-edge techniques to target the various game fish most sought after within each specific Seminar Series tour region.

The Concept

The Seminar Series uses a team-teaching concept where four faculty members take the stage for each session. Every team member is an authority on the respective topic. This makes for an entertaining and lively exchange of information, with in-depth discussions on various approaches to catch the species being covered. Faculty teams are well-versed on fishing different



FACULTY TEAM: At every venue, national fishing authorities and local pros divulge angling secrets and offer expert advice.

locations in each specific Seminar Series region with artificials, as well as live and dead natural bait.

The beauty of combining national and local talent for a session is the exchange of ideas and fishing methods that takes place, helping Seminar Series attendees expand their knowledge of different game-fish species, their habits, and the wide array of tried-and-true tactics employed by top anglers throughout the country.

The Venues

Most Seminar Series event venues are located near a major interstate, are easy to get to and offer plenty of parking. They are all performing-arts theatres and ballrooms where the acoustics are perfect, seating is comfortable and controlled lighting maximizes onstage visual presentations.

Photos and graphics of specific rigs, techniques and the species being covered, along with video, will be shown on 10-by-10-foot screens set up at both ends of the seminar stage to help illustrate demonstrations and reinforce key points made by faculty experts.

The Door Prizes

A Seminar Series tradition, thousands of dollars worth of door prizes are up for grabs at each tour location. These include reels, sunglasses, lures, coolers, kites, dredges, teasers, Bass Pro Shops gift certificates, Nu-Ice packs and a whole lot more. In addition, a grand prize — a fishing trip to the fabulous Florida Keys — will be awarded at each location, and two weeks after the eighth and final seminar, a super grand prize — a Mako Pro 17 Skiff CC — will go to the winner

**2015
Super
Grand Prize
Mako Pro 17
Skiff CC**

JUST BY SHOWING UP: Come to any of this year's seminars and you could take home a fully rigged Mako Pro 17 Skiff, as your name will instantly be included in a drawing to take place two weeks after the final event.



of a drawing comprising the names of all those who attended one of the events.

The Sponsors

Want a peek at some of the latest fishing tackle, marine electronics and accessories? Seminar Series sponsors, including Bass Pro Shops, Penn, Rapala, Sufix, Williamson, VMC, Simrad, Columbia Sportswear, Mako, Costa, Engel, Star Tron, and the Florida Keys and Key West, will have products on display and representatives on hand to answer questions.

The Stash

In addition to five hours of instruction by top national and local pros and chances at numerous door prizes, each ticket holder also receives a one-year subscription or extension to *Salt Water Sportsman*, a course textbook, one Roffers Ocean Fishing Forecast Analysis, a \$10 Bass Pro Shops discount card (on any purchase of \$75 or more), a bottle of OrPine Wash & Wax, a bottle of Corrosion Block, a bottle of Star Tron fuel additive and a bottle of Star brite Boat Guard.

The After-Party

New this year, the local Bass Pro Shops store is hosting a party after the seminar at five of the tour's eight locations:

Cary, North Carolina; Islamorada, Florida; Fairhope, Alabama; Port St. Lucie, Florida and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

The parties will run from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and afford every seminar attendee and a guest the chance to mingle with George Poveromo and other faculty experts. A Seminar Series name badge will be required to attend.

How to Register

Tickets are \$55 and can be ordered with a major credit card by calling 1-800-448-7360 or online at nationalseminarseries.com. This is a one-day school you don't want to miss. So act fast, or you might not get a seat! 🍷

2015 TOUR STOPS

Held on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., every event of the 2015 Seminar Series features George Poveromo, editor-at-large for *Salt Water Sportsman* and host of *George Poveromo's World of Saltwater Fishing* on NBC Sports, and he's bringing along an impressive lineup of national and regional experts with one thing in mind: helping you catch more fish!

Boston - Jan. 10

Atlantic City, N.J. - Jan. 17

Cary, N.C. - Jan. 24

Islamorada, Fla. - Jan. 31

Fairhope, Ala. - Feb. 7

Long Island, N.Y. - Feb. 21

Port St. Lucie, Fla. - Feb. 28

Myrtle Beach, S.C. - March 7

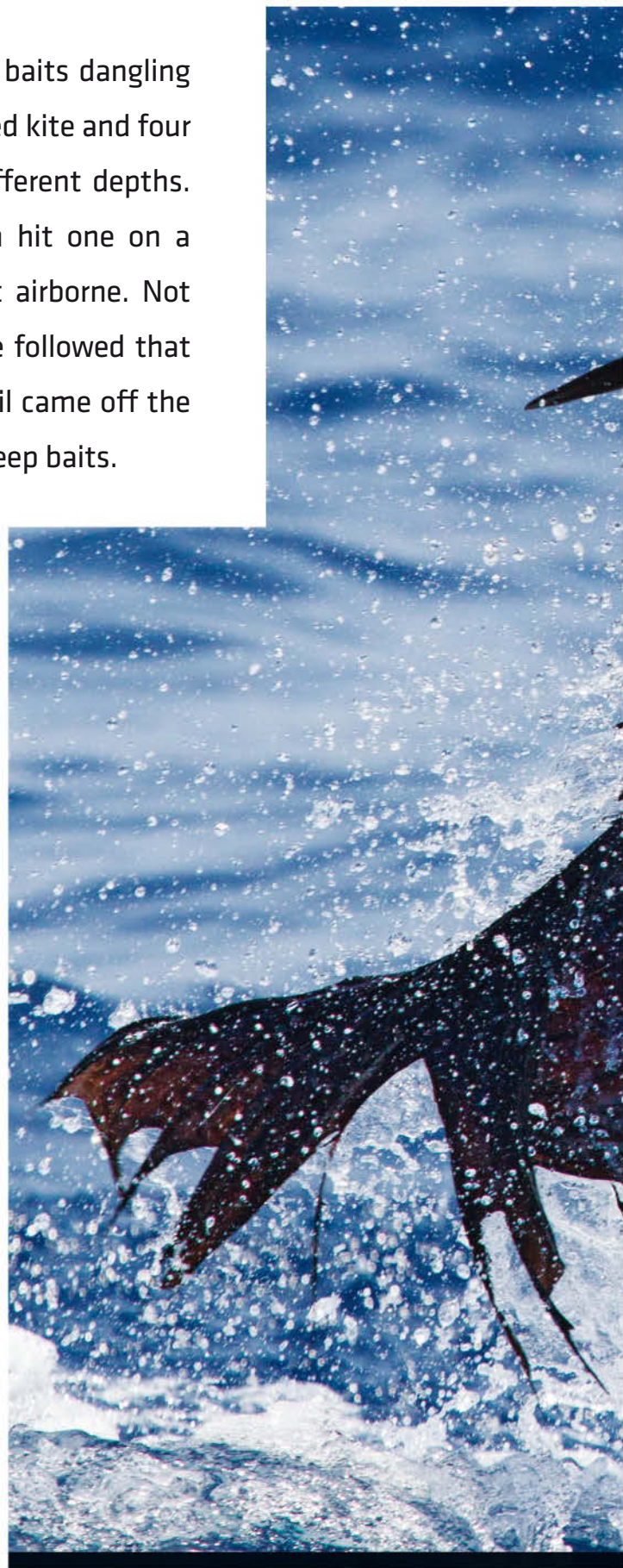


Out went our spread: three live baits dangling downwind from a bow-positioned kite and four others upwind, staggered at different depths. Just a moment later, a sailfish hit one on a flat line and immediately went airborne. Not 30 minutes after its release, we followed that up with a doubleheader. One sail came off the kite, the other took one of the deep baits.

It was a great start to a solid day of fishing in South Florida, where sailfish season kicks off around Thanksgiving and remains strong until the end of March. From Miami to Key West, the waters are just teeming with sails during that stretch. Catch the action when major bodies of fish push through and double-digit releases are common. Of course, sailfishing has its off days, but with the right tactics, the odds of catching fish soar, even during slow periods.

Contributing Factors

Four basic factors contribute to successful sailfishing: First, a northbound current, which moves groups of fish and creates rips and edges as it meets inshore waters. The mixing and abutting of waters results in nutrient-rich upwellings that attract and displace baitfish, creating sailfish-feeding zones. Edges, like current rips, color changes — particularly those formed when a strong easterly wind pushes cobalt blue water into cloudy blue or green water — even tide lines are important because they concentrate both bait and sailfish. Structure is another key factor, so look for zones where a current, color change or rip overlays a wreck, underwater mound or steep bottom slope. Such structures typically hold plenty of bait and are excellent places to live-bait or troll in the absence of a well-defined current or edge. Finally, bait is the last piece of the puzzle. Find heavy concentrations of flying fish, showering ballyhoo or other baitfish





Sailfish STRATEGIES

**FIVE PROVEN
APPROACHES FOR
THE SOUTH FLORIDA
WINTER SEASON**

By George Poveromo

RICHARD GIBSON



BROADER COVERAGE: An effective spread begins with a fishing kite, which positions baits at the surface, downwind of a drifting boat. Inset, a brightly colored float at the top of the leader assists in monitoring kite baits at a distance.

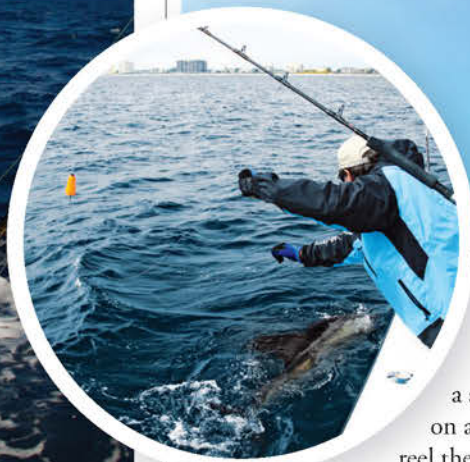
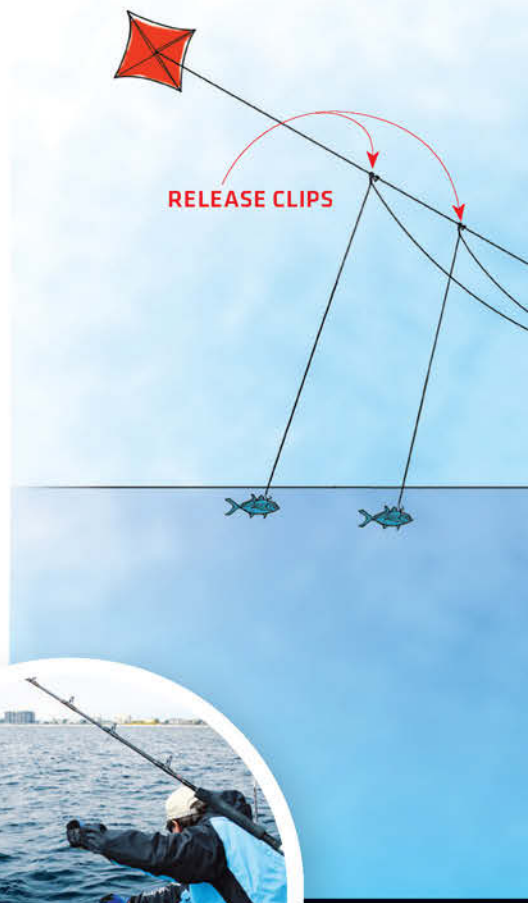
schooling and you are bound to find sailfish. Incidentally, keeping an eye on your sonar and scanning the horizon for birds working can shorten the search.

Winning Combination

The premier method for targeting sailfish is kite-fishing with live bait. A kite spreads baits out over a greater swath of water and holds them at the surface, where their swimming and thrashing dispatches distress vibrations that ring the dinner bell. And because the baits dangle from the kite, terminal hardware

and leaders remain above the surface, out of sight. If you fly two kites and are using a sea anchor to keep the bow into the seas or slow your drift, rig the kites so one flies more to port side and the other to starboard. That's accomplished by adding split shots to the opposite upper or lower corners of each kite.

Hardy baits like goggle-eyes, blue runners, threadfin herring and mullet are the most productive for kite-fishing. Bridling the baits is recommended, and someone should monitor each kite to keep the baits at the surface and watch



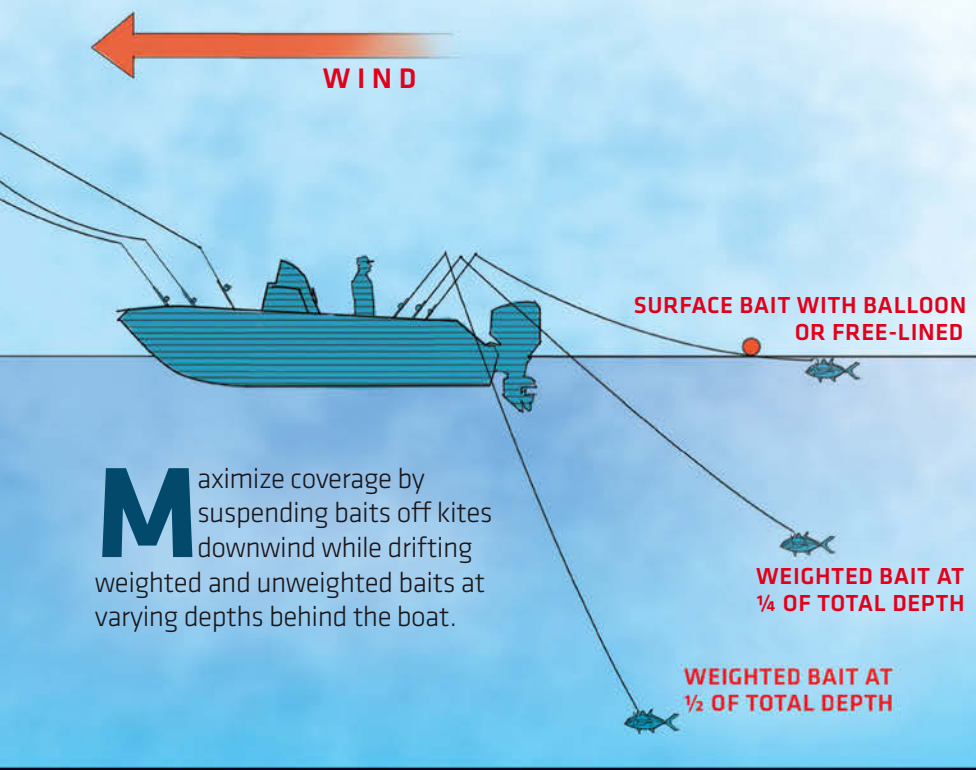
for sailfish. When a sail rises on a kite bait, reel the bait to the surface so the leader

is out of the water. That reduces the risk of the fish becoming bill wrapped when it eats. Then snap the line out of the release clip, aim the rod tip toward the sailfish and follow it as you take up slack; the rod should point directly at the fish so when you come tight and line races off the reel, the pressure sets the circle hook. Keep as many lines in the water as possible during the fight for possible multiple hookups.

While flying kites to present baits downwind of the boat, another proven strategy can also be orchestrated. On the upwind side of a drifting boat, or off the transom when employing a sea anchor, dispatch a couple of surface baits (possibly one with a balloon float) and a couple of baits rigged with

GEORGE POVEROMO (3)

LIVE-BAIT SPREAD



Maximize coverage by suspending baits off kites downwind while drifting weighted and unweighted baits at varying depths behind the boat.

enough weight to keep one down at a quarter of the depth and another at half the depth.

Hit the Showers

Ballyhoo populations peak in winter, and sailfish are known to corral these baitfish over shallow patch reefs and right off the beach in as little as 10 feet of water. That happens often in the Florida Keys, where sight-fishing for sails amid ballyhoo showers is a classic

scenario. Fishing ballyhoo showers is generally best when an early morning incoming tide pushes clean water and hordes of ballyhoo over the patch reefs. At a low angle, the sun illuminates a greater area of the water and the bottom, so the same holds true late in the afternoon. A north wind seems to stack the ballyhoo and trigger aggressive feeding. Live ballyhoo are a must for the task. You can chum them up with frozen chum over patch reefs, then catch them

LIVE BALLYHOO FOR CASTING



[1] Start by fastening a piece of copper rigging wire to the eye of a circle hook and hooking the ballyhoo through the lower jaw. **[2]** Wrap the copper wire around both the beak of the ballyhoo and the hook shank. **[3]** Next, wrap the wire back along the hook shank, past the eye and around both the beak and the leader. Then quickly return the rigged ballyhoo to the livewell.



SOUTH FLORIDA SAILFISH

RODS

20- to 30-pound conventional or spinning for kite-fishing and trolling; 12- to 20-pound spinning for instant drop-backs and casting to fish feeding or cruising on the surface



REELS

12- to 30-pound class, spinning or conventional, to match rods



LINE

12- to 30-pound monofilament line and 15-foot wind-on leader of 40- to 50-pound fluorocarbon

BAIT

Hardy live baits, like goggle-eyes, blue runners, threadfin herring and mullet are best for kite-fishing; bridling them is recommended. Opt for rigged live ballyhoo to coax fish off dredges and teasers or if fishing ballyhoo showers.

HOOKS

Light wire, in-line circle hooks, 4/0 to 7/0, depending on the size of the bait



KITE-RIGGED: Goggle eyes, or other kite baits, should be bridled through the back to minimize trauma and let them breath properly while suspended at the surface, where they create a most alluring commotion.

with a cast net or gold hooks.

Once rigged and ready, idle about the patches looking for ballyhoo showers. Sporadic bursts of ballyhoo usually mean mackerel and barracuda, but when ballyhoo shower in a uniform direction, like flying fish, that's the mark of sailfish. Race to the spot, trying to keep the sun and wind at your back, and look for the long, dark shadows of sailfish. Once you locate the sails, cast a few feet in front of them.



Fish-raising Illusions

Trolling dredges and teasers in lieu of live-baiting is an excellent tactic. Seasoned game-boat crews make an art of fabricating tantalizing dredges with dozens of fresh mullet and ballyhoo, a time-consuming undertaking. However, variations on that theme also bode well. For instance, artificial dredge kits by Strike Point and Strip Teaser offer clear dredge strips garnished with as many as 156 reflective baitfish decals that resemble a huge school of bait. The baitfish-school illusion can be enhanced by pulling daisy chains of artificial squid or mullet from the outriggers

A dredge should be set back and deep, but still remain visible. A clear view is essential to spotting and baiting an interested sailfish. I deploy a pair of dredges, one cleated off each transom corner, along with daisy-chain teasers positioned just outside and in front of each dredge, in clean water. I run my teaser lines through my farthest outrigger eyes.

Dredges function best at slower trolling speeds, around 5 to 7 mph. Use the same pitch-bait outfits you

would use when targeting sails around showering ballyhoo, matching the size of the bait to that of the replicas on the dredge. When a fish rises on a surface teaser, wind in that teaser and pitch a bait alongside it. Then get the pitch bait skipping and position it in front of the sailfish. The goal is to coax the sailfish off the teaser and onto the pitch bait.

With a fish on the dredge, pitch a bait back and free-spool it, keeping the rod tip low to the water. The bait should sink just ahead of the fish, appearing injured. You'll sometimes have to tease the fish by keeping the bait in front of it, imparting taunting actions like it's trying to get away.

Modified Standby

Die-hard natural bait trollers can use the same setup in conjunction with a spread of skipping and swimming ballyhoo rigged on circle hooks and 50-pound fluorocarbon leaders. Position the flat-line baits at the surface, 10 or so feet behind the dredges, or to the outside if using the short rigger clips. The outrigger baits should be staggered between

100 and 300 feet behind the closest baits, with any center rigger bait some 400 to 500 feet back.

Put the recommended tactics into practice, focusing on bait-rich pockets, rips, color changes, wrecks or other notable structure in 90 to 300 feet of water. When you locate an active zone, shorten your drifts accordingly or just slow-troll. Remember, the broader the area your baits cover, the more likely that sailfish will find them. 🐟

GEORGE POVEROMO (5)



NUMBERS GAME: In South Florida waters, when the conditions are right and you employ the proper tactics, you are bound to tally multiple releases.

**SOUTH FLORIDA
SAILFISH**

WHAT

Atlantic sailfish

WHERE

Miami to Key West

WHEN

November through March

WHO

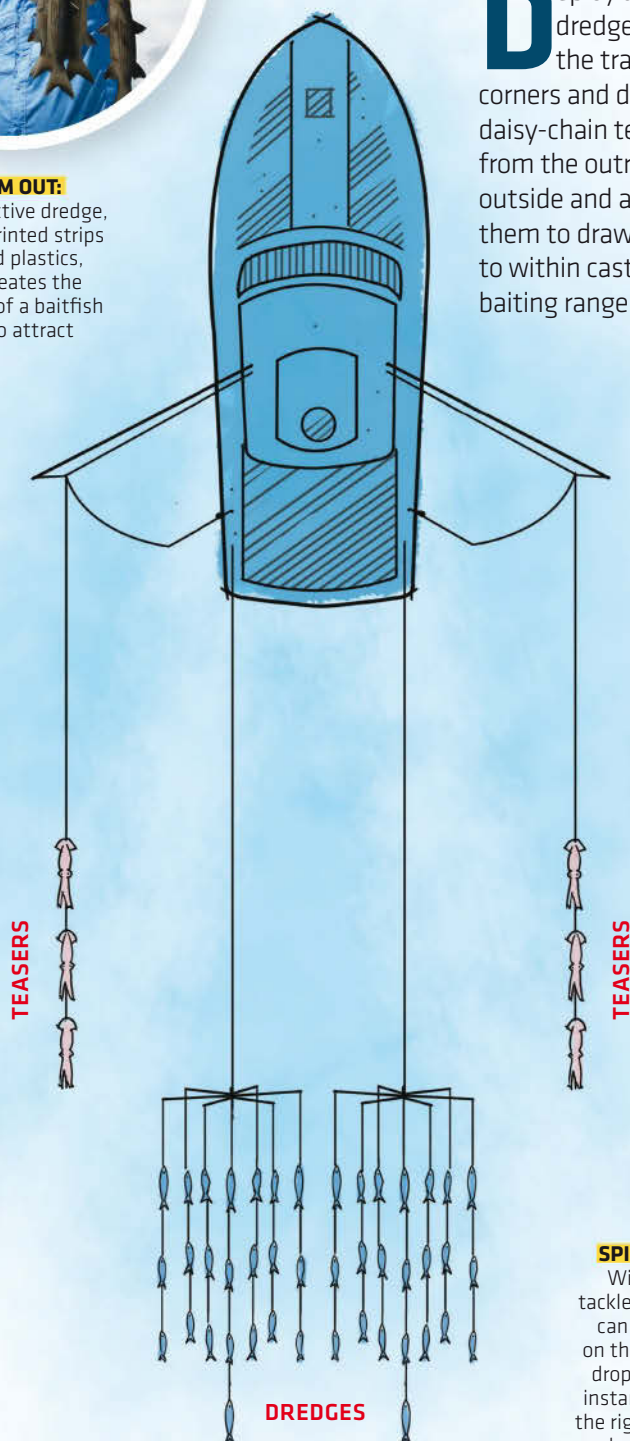
Anglers with boats equipped to deploy six or more rigs at once, to keep a decent supply of live bait onboard and to venture safely offshore during the windier months

**SOUPED-UP
TROLLING SPREAD**

Deploy a pair of dredges off the transom corners and drag daisy-chain teasers from the outriggers outside and ahead of them to draw sails to within casting or baiting range.

FAKE 'EM OUT:

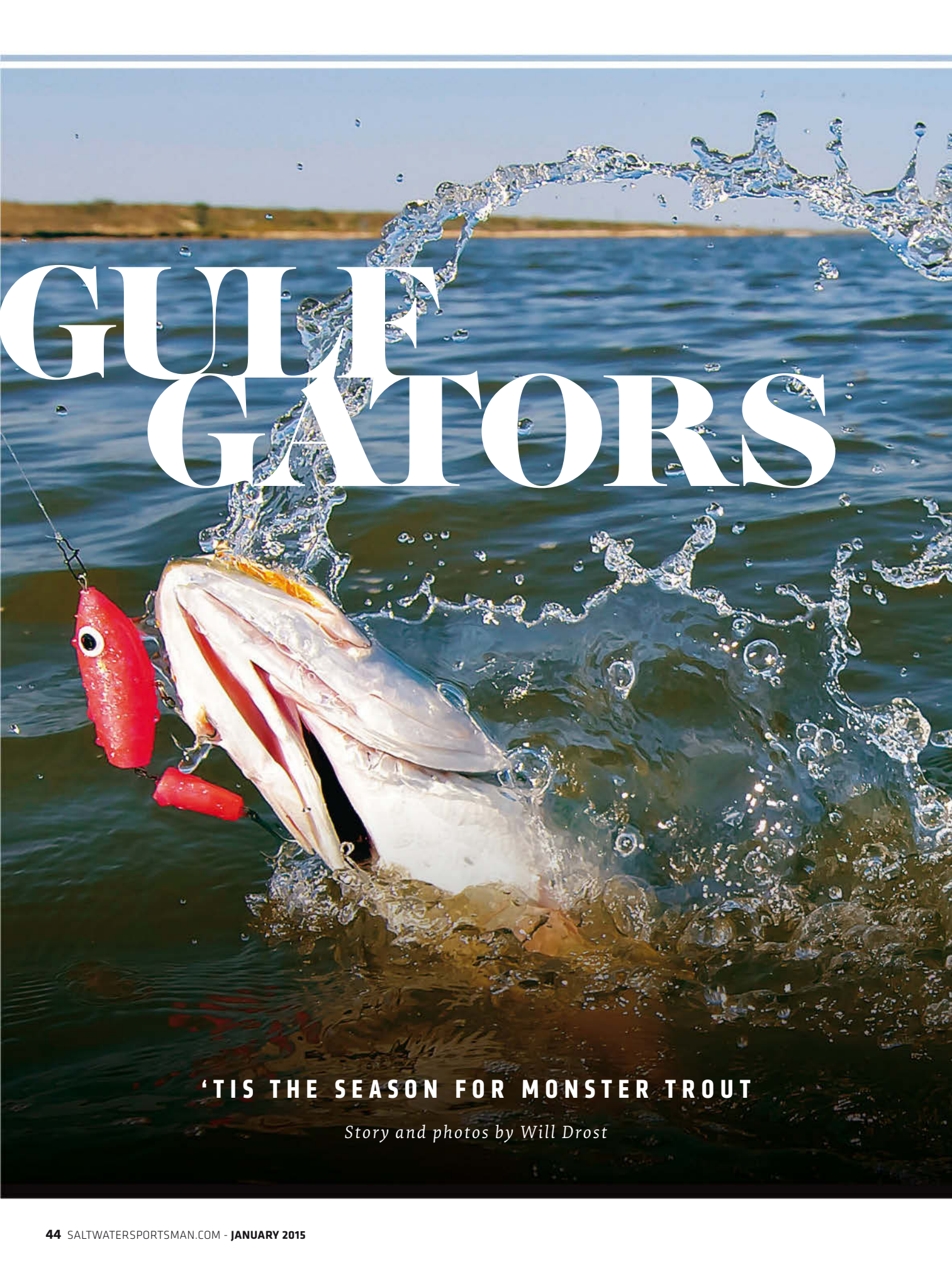
An effective dredge, either printed strips or rigged plastics, inset, creates the illusion of a baitfish school to attract sailfish.



SPIN DOCTOR:

With spinning tackle, the angler can cast to fish on the surface or drop a bait back instantly. Above, the right strategy and planning pay big dividends.



A large, detailed photograph of a trout leaping from the water. The fish is captured mid-jump, with its body arched and its mouth wide open, revealing a bright red lure with a white eye. A massive splash of water erupts behind the fish, creating a crown-like shape. The background shows a calm body of water under a clear sky.

GULF GATORS

'TIS THE SEASON FOR MONSTER TROUT

Story and photos by Will Drost

**EXPLOSIVE REACTION:**

Soft, jointed artificials and bait-casting outfits are the norm for big winter trout.

C

CAPT. BRUCE BAUGH LAUNCHED HIS LURE AND HOOKED UP THE INSTANT IT TOUCHED THE WATER. "THIS IS A GOOD ONE," HE EXCLAIMED AS BRAIDED LINE SCREECHED THROUGH HIS ROD GUIDES. A BIG TROUT — THE FISH RESPONSIBLE — THRASHED VIOLENTLY, EXPOSING ITS THICK BLACK BACK AS IT SURFED BETWEEN THE WAVES AND TAIL-WALKED ACROSS THE SURFACE.

It was a brisk and humid 37 degrees, probably a better day for a duck hunt, but Capt. Baugh and I were bundled up, buttoned down and committed to our quest for trophy specs. Little had been said en route to our first fishing spot. The arctic blast that ripped through the Gulf Coast five days earlier still had a grip on the area, and concerns about its chilling effect weighed heavily on my mind. Upon arrival, however, our outlook instantly changed. The cove in front of us was full of life. A flock of terns, spread out over hundreds of yards, picked small glass minnows off the whitecaps. Brown pelicans crashed into schools of mullet, and a group of seagulls wheeled about frantically, moving down the shoreline we planned to fish. "Look, birds are working right in there," barked Capt. Baugh before quickly tying on a soft, jointed broken-back lure. Soon after moving the boat into position, he and I were in the water, wading quietly toward the action.

Baugh was first to hook up, but I promptly followed suit. Right after chunking my lure into the melee, I felt a distinct thump, so I set the hook and soon brought a trout of nearly 6 pounds to the BogaGrip. Mine was a respectable catch, but Baugh's pulled his scale down farther, stopping just before the 10-pound mark. We carefully revived both trout and let them go back to their business.

The action was hot but short-lived. We enjoyed the chaos; unfortunately, that school of big fish eventually disbanded.

Knowing they couldn't have gone very far, we kept working the shoreline, catching big speckled trout here and there for several hundred yards. This particular stretch was a sandy flat with pockets of clam, oyster and mud that held tremendous amounts of bait. As fish fed on schooling baitfish, small slicks began to form, and we spent the next several hours quietly wading in clear, knee-deep water, releasing a number of trout in the 5- to 10-pound range along the way.

Chilling Discovery

I have chased spotted seatrout — also known as speckled trout — throughout the Gulf Coast most of my life, be it hot or cold, in water dirty and clean. Over time, I've learned that when winter sets in you can always rely on fishing deeper water. That's where you find trout seeking the comfort of warmer-water thermoclines. Many of my most memorable fishing trips, in fact, have taken place just after a winter blast stacked schools of trout in deep water. But more and more, trophy trout aficionados are discovering that the larger females don't really mind water temperatures in the low 50s, and they can be targeted effectively by wading quietly in waist- to knee-deep water.

Cause and Effect

On the northern Gulf of Mexico, cold fronts start to arrive in late September. By December, they are pushing through consistently, and shrimp start moving out of the marshes and into the bays. Come January, the fronts become stronger, water temperatures fall and the shrimp head out to sea. According to Michael Harbison, biologist for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the lack of shrimp then leaves seatrout to pursue scaled prey. "In the coldest days of winter, they mostly see mullet and menhaden on the menu, as very few shrimp remain. Really, though, estuaries along the Gulf Coast



STEALTHY APPROACH: Artificials that mimic mullet flip the switch on large winter trout. Right, when the temperature drops, search deeper water for schooled fish. Below, wading allows anglers to stalk trout without alarming them.

hold great quantities of bait all year long, and that is responsible for our generous population of fish."

Seatrout stage at the passes, near bayou outlets, in coves and along shorelines where the bottom is a mixture of mud and sand. Barring periods of excessive rainfall, cold, calm nights usually make for clear water conditions. Trophy-size fish — often called gator trout — seek shallow zones where the sun warms up the bottom and bait gathers. "Bait will try to migrate to the edges and seek shelter in the grass, but because of low water levels from strong north winds, baitfish like mullet often find themselves unprotected at the water's edge," says Harbison.



Banker's Hours

In the winter months, Capt. David Rowsey sometimes advises his clients to sleep in. "I like to start fishing later in the morning, say, from 10 a.m. until dusk, to stay out late enough to catch the bite right before sundown. I focus on protected shorelines that warm up as the day progresses," he says. Rowsey likes to look for trout that pull up in knee-deep water. He notes that winter has a way of moving big females around. "I have many sweet spots or go-to areas, but on cold days, I focus on places that hold bait." While Rowsey agrees that a mullet-filled shoreline can make for quite a trophy trout day, he doesn't only focus on that. "I'm perfectly happy finding a school of small trout. Many times, I locate dinks feeding aggressively. I like that." Rowsey's vast experience and time on the water has proven that small trout schools are

also a food source for much larger fish. Says Rowsey, "Just the other day, we were catching small fish, and my clients asked, 'Where are the big girls?'"

'Just wait,' I said. And soon enough, the smaller fish just stopped biting, and we started catching and releasing trout up to 30 inches."

Muddy Wonderland

While a Louisiana and a Texas guide might disagree on the exact definition of muddy bottom, both concur that it is the place to land a trout of a lifetime and that wading is the right modus operandi. "There are places that will challenge wading anglers. I have caught really big fish carefully walking in shin-deep mud, but for the most part, ankle-deep mud mixed with sand warms up quickly, and fishing there is fun and easy," says Baugh. "But the muddier the better when it gets

really cold." Capt. Rowsey likes these areas, too. "I like guts that parallel shorelines and are a mix of mud and sand. Sometimes it can be just a subtle 6-inch drop; that's why wading works so well," he says. But those areas are just one factor. Both guides believe sustained temperatures are also important. "Everything depends on sustained water temperatures from the mid-50s into the 60s. A big downswing will scatter fish." Pre-frontal days, however, reign supreme. "I love pre-frontal conditions right up until a cold front hits," says Rowsey.

Pro's Choice

When it comes to lures, Baugh favors mullet imitations and various suspending baits in different sizes and shapes. He helped develop a specialized lure for seatrout that has proven most effective. "These broken-back lures



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SWS Planner

NORTHERN GULF COAST TROUT

WHAT

Trophy seatrout

WHEN

Year-round, but exceptionally good October through May.

WHERE

Louisiana and Texas coasts

WHO

Anyone willing to wade in cold water can target large trout, but many of the better wading spots can only be accessed by water. Local knowledge is a big asset, and a boat makes it easier to search for areas with the right conditions to hold trophy fish. The following charter captains help simplify the process:

Lake Calcasieu, Louisiana

Capt. Bruce Baugh
337-660-1814

tidelinechartersllc.com

Laguna Madre, Texas

Capt. David Rowsey
361-960-0340

davidrowsey.com

Hackberry, Louisiana

Capt. Guy Stansel
337-762-3391

SHALLOW-MINDED: During winter, hefty seatrout, like this impressive pair, are often caught in ankle- to waist-deep water.

have a good sink rate, they cast well and mimic a large injured mullet," he says. Paul Brown's Originals and other MirrOlures also work extremely well on big winter trout, in addition to a number of topwaters.

Capt. Rowsey agrees, but he will not leave port without a healthy supply of 5-inch Bass Assassins. He likes to rig them with 1/16-ounce jig heads and small short-shank hooks. "Big wide-gap hooks hang too much in the grass, and giant trout throw heavier jig heads easily with their head shakes," Rowsey notes. "Bass Assassins work anytime, anyplace, and when I have conditions dialed in, I use a Paul Brown's Floater."

"I am not a bright-color guy," says Rowsey. "We fish a lot of clear water, and the clearer it is, the more natural the lure color should be." Baugh agrees, but he adds that in Louisiana, he guides clients in off-color water most of the time. "I'll fish bright colors, but more importantly, I find that large lures move a lot of water and that's crucial. Larger lures definitely work in muddy water," says Baugh.

Sometimes, fishing a lure slowly, very slowly, is the key. In fact, many strikes occur when the lure is stopped. So don't assume lethargy when the temperature drops. Despite the cold water, winter trophy trout strike and pull with authority. 🐟



NORTHERN GULF COAST TROUT

RODS

7-foot bait-casting rods by Waterloo Rods, Fishing Tackle Unlimited or equivalent



REELS

Quality bait casters by 13 Fishing, Quantum or equivalent



LINES

30-pound Suffix braid, 20-pound Fins Wind Tamer or equivalent

LEADER

9 feet of 20- to 25-pound fluorocarbon attached to main line with double Uni-knot.

LURES

1. MirrOlure Paul Brown's Floating Fatboy and **2.** MirrOdine; **3.** 5-inch Bass Assassins in black and pearl, chartreuse and pearl, or pink; B & L Bait Company soft plastics.

OTHER

Simms or other quality chest waders

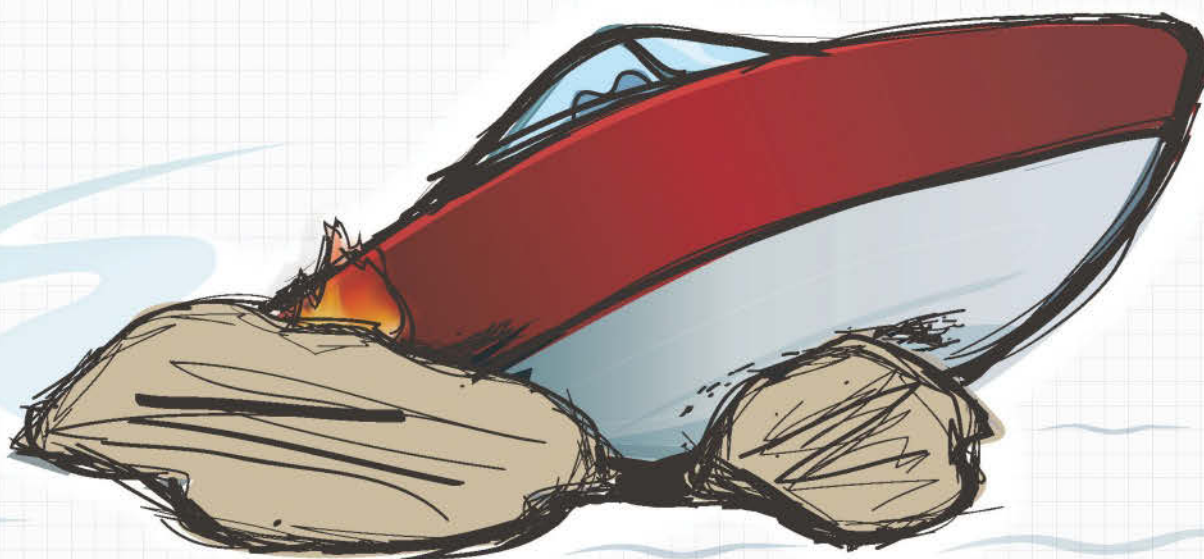




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new propeller: \$350
towing service: \$500
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> **\$35**

cost for boater safety course that
could have prevented this accident

80% of boating deaths occurred on boats where the
operator had not received boating safety instruction.



Produced under a grant from the Sport Fish Restoration and
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Education Prevents Accidents.
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NEW ELECTRONICS FOR 2015

A new crop of marine electronics improves navigation, communications and fishing.

By Jim Hendricks

Marine electronics companies continue to pump out new products and enhanced features at a mind-boggling pace. Remarkable advances in sonar, radar, chart plotting, AIS, thermal imaging, communications, electronic security

and onboard entertainment emerge almost weekly. It's a great time to be a boating angler, but staying current on the latest electronics isn't easy. To help out, here's a preview of some products you're likely to see on saltwater fishing boats in 2015.





1

HUMMINBIRD HELIX

The Helix series from Humminbird includes five models with varying functions and 5-inch 480-by-800 pixel high-definition color screens. The top-of-the-line Helix5 SI-GPS features side imaging, down imaging, conventional 500W sonar, GPS and a chart plotter with a host of electronic cartography options, including LakeMaster and Navionics Gold/Hot Maps, via the micro SD-card slot. It has a built-in Contour XD map and is compatible with Humminbird's AutoChart and AutoChart Pro. The SI reads up to 100 feet on either side of the boat, while the sonar reads down to 1,500 feet. This new model stores up to 2,750 waypoints. **\$199 to \$499; humminbird.com**

2

LOWRANCE HDS GEN3 SERIES

The new HDS Gen3 multifunction displays from Lowrance combine lightning-fast processors with advanced fish-finder technologies in 7-, 9- and 12-inch models. Touch-screen icon-driven scrolling menus and slider bars offers simple access to functions such as StructureScan HD, DownScan Imaging and CHIRP sonar. Wireless connectivity lets you directly download mapping and software updates. All HDS Gen3 models offer plug-and-play compatibility with Lowrance Broadband Radar, SonicHub, SiriusXM, Class B AIS, DSC VHF, and Lowrance Outboard Pilot. Each has built-in Insight USA charts, but they also run Insight HD and Pro, and Insight Genesis, as well as C-MAP MAX-N+ and Navionics. **\$1,199 to \$3,199; lowrance.com**

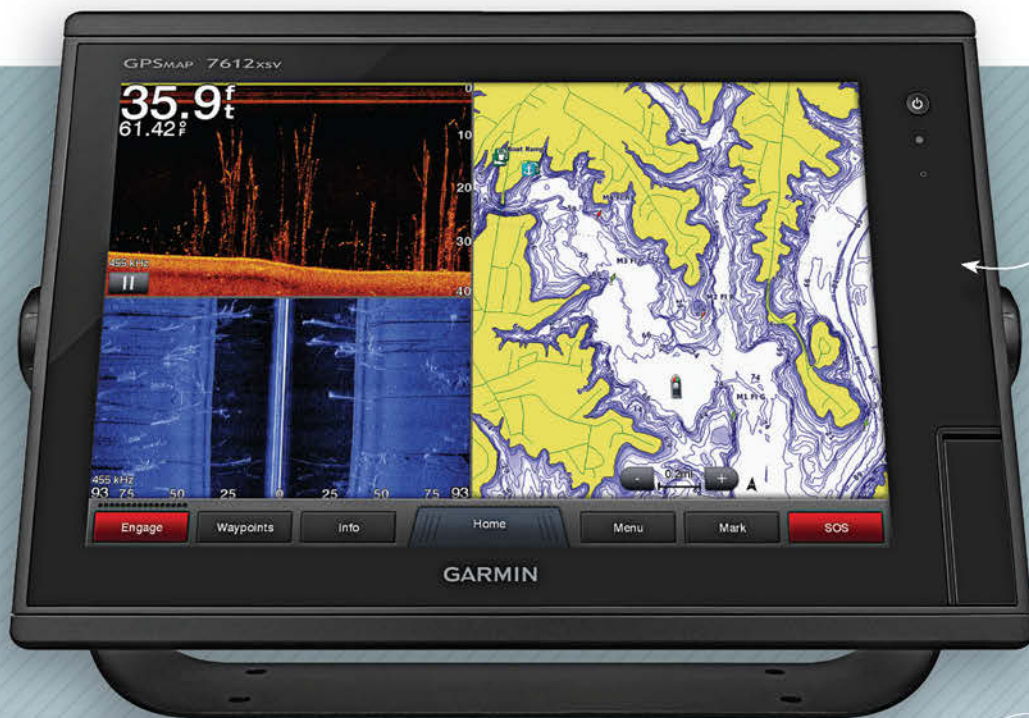
3

FLIR THERMAL MONITOR

The compact, waterproof FLIR AX8 is designed for permanent mounting to provide simultaneous temperature and visual monitoring of systems and compartments below deck, such as the engine room. Two lenses – a thermal sensor and digital camera – provide streaming video to a monitor or multifunction display. The sensitive thermal imager detects excessive temperatures such as an overheating turbo or an overloaded fuse. You can also combine the thermal and visible-light images for a sharper image and greater context. Smaller than a mobile phone, it installs in the tightest compartments. **\$999; flir.com**



NEW ELECTRONICS FOR 2015



1

FURUNO WIRELESS RADAR

Furuno's DRS-4W 1st Watch Wireless Radar combines a compact 12½-pound 4 kW radome with an iOS mobile device such as an iPad or iPhone. It uses a free app to display radar returns on up to two devices at once. A small antenna on the bottom of the dome transmits the wireless radar signal to your mobile device. A simple Apple interface lets you change range from .125

to 24 nm. With the iPad, you can also read target bearing and distance. You do need to wire 12-volt power to the dome, which draws less than 2 amps. **\$1,695; furunousa.com**



2

RAYMARINE CHIRP SIDEVISION

Raymarine's CP200 CHIRP SideVision Sonar module employs the CPT-200 transom-mount transducer to present three preset transducer angles to optimize shallow, medium or deepwater situations. Using two independent sonar channels and advanced signal processing, the CP200 delivers highly detailed returns, reminiscent of an ultrasound. Integration with a Raymarine Lighthouse II multifunction display is simple, allowing you to read bottom and fish as far as 600 feet on either side of the boat. **\$609.99; raymarine.com**

3

GARMIN GPSMAP 7400/7600 MULTI-FUNCTION DISPLAYS

Available in sonar and non-sonar versions, the new GPSMAP 7400 and 7600 series of multifunction displays (MFDs) boast 7-, 8-, 10- and 12-inch displays and built-in 10 Hz GPS. Each offers pinch-to-zoom touchscreen capabilities, and can integrate functions such as digital switching, weather, radar, and thermal and IP cameras. The GPSMAP 7400xsv and 7600xsv series feature sonar, including traditional HD-ID sonar, 1 kW CHIRP sonar, and CHIRP DownVu and SideVu. Every GPSMAP 7400 model has a worldwide basemap series. BlueChart g2 coastal maps are preloaded to the GPSMAP 7600 MFDs. **Sonar models start at \$1,699.99, non-sonar at \$1,499.99;** garmin.com



2



5



4

FUSION BLACK BOX SYSTEM

The MS-BB300 black box sound system from Fusion offers Bluetooth connectivity with Apple iOS and Android/Windows media players, as well as USB/AUX connection options. It also offers Fusion-Link plug-and-play compatibility with NMEA 2000-enabled multifunction displays to control the Fusion True-Marine audio system. The MS-BB300 also includes a MS-NRX200i wired remote control with a large LCD and rotary encoder. The system provides three independent audio zones with both separate and gang volume control. The MS-BB300 also features an AM/FM/Sirius XM-ready tuner. **\$479;** fusionelectronics.com



4

5

STANDARD HORIZON HANDHELD

The floating, waterproof HX807, new from Standard Horizon, includes a 66-channel GPS receiver allowing the radio to transmit a DSC distress call with your vessel's position or navigate to a waypoint. It also has an oversize 2.3-inch diagonal dot-matrix LCD and intuitive menu system. DSC calling, position sharing, waypoint and route navigation and DSC distress calls require just a few simple steps. It stores up to 200 waypoints and 20 routes for navigating via the radio's unique compass page. Other advanced features include a water-activated SOS strobe light and weather alert. Supplied with a 1800 mAh Li-ion battery, 110VAC and 12VDC chargers. **\$249.99;** standardhorizon.com

NEW ELECTRONICS FOR 2015



1

SHAKESPEARE'S HDTV ANTENNAS

Shakespeare's new line of SeaWatch TV antennas deliver over-the-air digital high-definition TV reception aboard just about any boat. The three permanent-mount models — the ultra-compact 3004 with a 4-inch dome and the saucer-shaped 3015 and 3019 (15- and 19-inch diameters) — are threaded to accept common 1-inch antenna mounts and include 20 feet of low-loss RG-59 coaxial cable, F-connectors, and a 30 dB low-noise amplifier with AC and DC power supplies. When paired with an optional two-way band separator between the antenna and the amplifier, these antennas also receive AM/FM radio signals. A full line of mounts and extension masts are available to fine-tune the installation specifically to your boat. **\$161.95 (3004), \$170.95 (3015), \$244.95 (3019);** shakespeare-marine.com

2

SIMRAD HD RADAR

The new Advanced high-definition digital radar from Simrad features leading-edge signal processing and high-performance open-array scanners. The lineup includes 4- and 6-foot, 10 kW open arrays and a 7-foot, 25kW open array — all with long-life magnetrons and brushless motors for durability. Features include auto tune, gain and sea-clutter adjustments, auto harbor and offshore modes, and relative motion, allowing you to discern moving targets from stationary ones. They readily network with a high-speed heading sensor to enable chart/radar overlays. **Starting at \$6,199; simrad-yachting.com**

3

ICOM VHF

The new fixed-mount M324, M324G and M424G VHF radios feature built-in Class-D DSC and an integrated GPS (on G models). The soft-key assignments and directional keypad allow you to quickly navigate settings and radio functions. For better readability and nighttime operation, the dot-matrix displays are backlit. The M324 and M324G feature amber screens, while the M424G emits a white backlight. With the G models, you can view current position/time and access GPS waypoints. The M424G features public address, foghorn and active noise canceling. All three are rated IPX7 submersible. **\$199.99 (M324), \$259.99 (M324G), \$399.99 (M424G);** icomamerica.com

SIMRAD



4

AIRMAR CHIRP TRANSDUCERS

The new single-band CHIRP transducers from Airmar, designed to accommodate the growing number of single-band CHIRP sonars such as the Simrad NSS evo2 series, offer boating anglers compact transducers at lower cost than a multiband CHIRP 'ducer. Two of the new 1,000-watt models – the transom-mount TM185HW and through-hull B285HW – offer high-frequency operation and a 25-degree beamwidth for broader coverage. The series includes seven models in transom mount, flush through-hull and through-hull with fairing blocks. **Price TBD;** airmartechology.com



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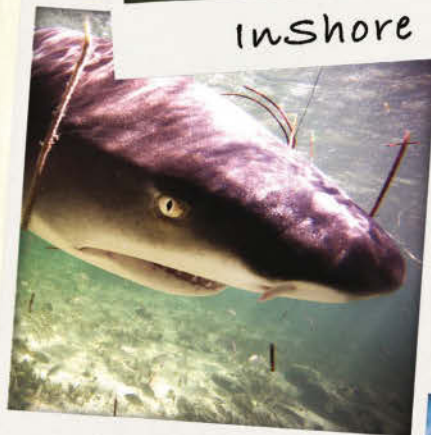
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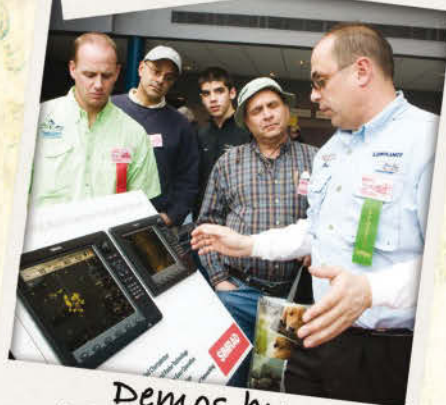
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SEA BORN FX22 TOURNAMENT

Here's another welcome addition to Sea Born's bay-boat lineup.



BY CAPT. DAVE LEAR

TEST CONDITIONS

LOCATION: St. Marks, Florida

WIND: Light and variable

SEA STATE: Smooth

TEST LOAD: One adult, 38 gallons of fuel



In the normal scenario, boat builders develop and incorporate new designs into a targeted model, then apply similar improvements to other boat sizes afterward to complete a specific line. With the introduction of the FX25, its hybrid bay boat, Sea Born followed this plan to perfection last year. The Georgia builder is now continuing the process with the FX22, a true tournament boat that's also proven a capable multitasker. With the help of Shields Marina in historic St. Marks, Florida,

I had the opportunity to see just what this 22-footer can do. My conclusion: a lot!

For starters, this is one of the biggest 22s out there, with tons of storage and fishing room. The large bow casting deck features the Sea Freeze divided icebox with extra insulation on the centerline. Another sizable storage compartment is located forward, and there are two companion boxes outboard to rack rods or other gear. The bow holds a dedicated anchor locker

Length: 21'9"

Beam: 8'5"

Draft: 11"

Fuel: 52 gal.

Transom deadrise: 17 degrees

Max hp: 250

Weight: 3,040 lb. w/250 hp

Base price: \$44,457

Sea Born Boats: 912-449-0033; seabornboats.com



The 25G Double Step Hull design on the Sea Born FX22 eats up a chop and provides improved performance and handling.



The divided Sea Freeze compartment in the forward casting deck has extra insulation to keep the day's catch fresh.



Twin aft jump seats feature stylish upholstery and they afford passengers a safe and comfortable boat ride.



A clear lid on the aerated 35-quart transom livewell makes it easy to keep an eye on your tournament catch or the live bait supply.

pre-wired for trolling motors. And for easy cleaning, all hatches on the FX22 are fully finished on both sides.

You'll find a 32-quart baitwell under the forward console seat, a 35-quart well with clear Plexiglas lid on the aft center casting deck and an 80-quart fish box to port. All are foam insulated and equipped with 1,000 gph pumps with seacocks, stainless through-hulls and high-speed pickups. The baitwells are finished in blue and rigged with blue LED lights. Additional rod storage includes six holders in the center console, four more in the leaning post, plus horizontal rod racks under the gunwales.

The aft deck includes two folding jump seats for passengers. The standard leaning post has a storage bin beneath the cushion, an integrated footrest and a cooler. On the console, you'll find backlit-LED rocker switches and push-button circuit breakers, a 12-volt

power port, and a stainless-steel steering wheel with knob augmented by standard hydraulic steering. A convenient glove box offers quick access to cellphones and other necessities, while the roomy electronics panel accommodates a large display. For those with low clearance considerations, the console windshield and handrail drop with a few quick adjustments. Premium upholstery with two-tone patterns adds a stylish look.

In addition to the aforementioned standard features, the optional LE package includes a raw-water washdown, console tackle center, cockpit coaming bolsters, marine stereo, tilt steering and a T-top with electronics box. All FX22 models come

standard with a 10-year transferable hull warranty, all-composite construction, self-bailing cockpit and an advanced fiberglass stringer system. Quality components are evident throughout, and the fit and finish is right in line with Sea Born's noteworthy attention to detail.

As on its larger sibling, the hull of the



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FX22 features twin steps for enhanced performance and fuel economy. The test model was powered by the new 2.8 liter Yamaha F200XB, which proved an ideal match. With a weight of just 489 pounds and an impressive hole shot, this power plant produced a top speed of nearly 50 mph at 5,800 rpm. During Yamaha's factory performance tests, the 22 sipped only 5.4 gph at its 3,500 rpm sweet spot, producing a range of 4.83 mpg at 26.1 mph. With a 52-gallon fuel capacity, that works out to an awful lot of fishing time.

Yamaha four-strokes are not the only power choice: The FX22 can also be ordered with Suzuki or Mercury four-stroke packages ranging from 150 up to 250 hp or Mercury two-stroke Optimax engines up to 250 hp. Bob's jack plates, Power-Pole anchor systems and trim tabs are available performance options.

I wanted to see how the twin-stepped hull performed during sudden maneuvers,

and it didn't disappoint. Try as I might, I couldn't get the stern to break loose, even in quick, hard turns. As noted, initial acceleration was fluid, and the bow settled nicely for unobstructed sight lines. Even with the motor trimmed way up, handling was very similar to expensive sports cars I've driven — deft, sure and exhilarating. The boat cut through the chop like a finely honed fillet knife. It was also very stable at rest, despite a deadrise of 17 degrees at the transom. I walked up and down the gunwales without noticing the slightest roll. This is truly a fun one to drive and, I expect, even more fun to fish.

If you're looking for a hard-core fishing machine that's equally adept at nearshore trolling or drifting the inshore flats, be sure to take a good look at the FX22. And if you also need a boat that'll double for family outings at the beach without breaking the bank, definitely put this one on the shortlist. 🍷

■ PERFORMANCE

RPM	MPH	GPH
3,000	19.7	4.1
3,500	26.1	5.4
4,500	37.2	7.2
5,500	46.7	16.4
5,800	49.7	19.4
with F200XB Yamaha outboard		

POWER OPTIONS:

Our test boat delivered solid performance with the Yamaha F200XB, but buyers may also elect power packages from Suzuki or Mercury, from 150 hp up to 250 hp.



**THANKS TO ALL PARTICIPANTS AND PARTNERS
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Hide and Seek

1. Camo on Demand

Columbia harnesses the power of the sun in its new **Solar Camo** long-sleeve shirt, available in January. Thanks to the sun-activated fabric technology, the shirt changes color when exposed to UV rays, turning darker or lighter to resemble clouds, which creates an advantageous camouflage for the angler, who then blends in with the sky while fishing. As late afternoon and evening approaches, the fabric continues to transform into a consistent dark gray that blends with the evening sky and is also more suitable for any post-fishing plans. **\$100 (knit); \$140 (woven); columbia.com**

2. Offshore Optics

Get the advantage of eagle vision with the new line of **Navigator Pro Marine** binoculars from **Steiner**. The optic technology reduces glare and keeps images sharply contoured from 20 yards to infinity with 7x magnification and Sports-Auto-Focus systems. The durable Makrolon housing, lightweight and tough enough to withstand on-the-water abuse, is water tight

to 5 meters with Steiner's patented N2 Injection system. New features include improved NBR rubber armoring, a comfortable neoprene neck strap and an internal light in compass models. **\$299.99-\$599.99; steiner-optics.com**

3. Almost Alive

Years of development pay off in the new line of soft-plastic baits from **Almost Alive Lures** based in North Carolina. Designed for a new level of super realism, the line covers an extensive list of inshore species for the coastal fisherman, from shrimp in four sizes and nine colors, to eels, menhaden, killifish, glass minnow, sand lance, flounder, mullet, and bay anchovy. The offshore line also features a wide selection of soft-plastic trolling lures, including horse ballyhoo, dink ballyhoo, mullet, ribbonfish, bluefish, cigar minnow, Spanish mackerel, mahimahi and full-body squids. **From \$2.99; almostlivelures.com**



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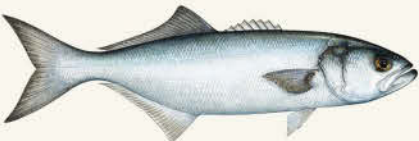
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BEST WORLDWIDE FISHING: December/January 2015

SPECIES	1st CHOICE	2nd CHOICE	COMMENTS
	Ecuador	Costa Rica	Pacific Blue Marlin: The new year brings outstanding action to Marlin Boulevard, which includes the waters off Salinas, Isla de la Plata and Manta. Local boats tangle with as many as a dozen blues on a good day. In Costa Rica, blues are on the prowl off Flamingo and Tamarindo this time of year. Look for them near schools of tuna.
	Brazil	Saint Lucia	Atlantic Blue Marlin: Vast schools of tuna come to forage around Royal Charlotte Bank, which in turn attract an increasing number of giant blues — many exceeding 700 pounds — to the area. With blue water and steep drop-offs so close to the island, Saint Lucia offers solid action minutes from port, and this is an excellent month.
	Panama	Australia	Black Marlin: In Panama, January signals the start of the dry season, and black marlin push closer to the coast, affording small boats better opportunity to get in on the action. Down under, most granders have departed, but plenty of 200- to 400-pounders remain around the Great Barrier Reef to make the visit worthwhile.
	Brazil	Barbados	White Marlin: This is peak time for white marlin off Vitoria, where hot action often starts before the first drop in the continental shelf, about 18 miles offshore. In Caribbean waters, the annual northerly migration makes white marlin a common catch for game boats out of Barbados and nearby Grenada this month.
	Mexico	Florida	Atlantic Sailfish: In Yucatan waters, January is when you start to find wolf packs pounding baitballs off Isla Mujeres and Cancun, and boats can tally 15 or 20 releases a day. In the Florida Keys, sails show up in droves to feed on ballyhoo schools congregating over the shallow patch reefs, setting up a perfect sight-fishing scenario.
	Guatemala	Costa Rica	Pacific Sailfish: In Guatemala, the fishing off-season is better than most other places during their peak, and now that the action approaches its summit, the numbers put up by the local fleets often sound like fairy tales. In Costa Rica, visiting anglers find an excellent sailfish bite from Puerto Carrillo south to just outside of Golfo Dulce.
	Mexico	Ecuador	Striped Marlin: The stretch from Bahia Magdalena south to Cabo San Lucas will be tough to beat this month, but the Galapagos Islands come close. When conditions are right, anglers expect 15 or more stripes a day at either location, but easier travel and more charter options give Mexico's west coast a definite edge.
	Bahamas	North Carolina	Wahoo: The island of San Salvador, Bahamas, still tops the list of best wahoo destinations this month. A submerged hump about 30 minutes from Riding Rock Marina is bound to be the epicenter of the action. In Tarheel state waters, those angling for 'hoos do well trolling along ledges in the 30- to 50-fathom range.
	Mexico	Louisiana	Yellowfin Tuna: When it comes to yellowfins, the offshore banks off the coast of Mexico's Baja Peninsula reign supreme this time of year. In Louisiana, yellowfin tuna in the 50- to 120-pound range are still going strong off Venice, but they require long runs to the oil rigs out in 3,000 feet or deeper.
	North Carolina	Virginia	Bluefin Tuna: The winter bluefin bite continues hot and heavy off the Outer Banks and Morehead City. This could be another good season for bluefins off Virginia Beach. Instead of chunking or live-baiting while anchored, you'll do better covering water. Troll outside the 3-mile line from Cape Henry to Sandbridge for best results.

SPECIES	1st CHOICE	2nd CHOICE	COMMENTS
	Bahamas	Belize	Bonefish: In the Bahamas, bonefishing remains strong, but fewer fish will prowls the extreme shallows. Look for large schools over grass and mud bottom along flats edges and in the channels. Bonefishing in Belize is back in full swing, as extended periods of rain and high winds become the exception rather than the norm.
	Belize	Costa Rica	Snook: In Belize, this is the time to catch a trophy: Large spawning-size linesiders are very active in and around the coastal rivers. In Costa Rica, calva (aka fat snook) invade rivers on the Caribbean side, like the Parismina, Colorado and Pacuare, to spawn. Meanwhile, you'll find the larger common snook at the mouths of the rivers and in the surf.
	Belize	Florida	Tarpon: Pods of 20- to 40-pounders cruise Belizean flats this time of year, while fewer, but much larger fish hang out at the river mouths. In South Florida, tarpon stack up in Port Everglades, Miami's Government Cut and Key West Harbor. Night fishing will prove particularly productive, especially during a shrimp run.
	Belize	Mexico	Permit: The great action around Turneffe, Dangriga and Placencia farther south, makes Belize the top permit destination this time of year. Anglers fishing the bays along the Yucatan's southernmost reaches, from Boca Paila to Xcalak, get plenty of shots at 5- to 15-pound permit, as well as a few trophies twice that size.
	Louisiana	Florida	Red Drum: Lots of big fish and little pressure make for unforgettable outings in Louisiana's salt marshes. Just keep an eye on the weather and try to avoid fishing during cold snaps. In Florida, fishing banker's hours in Mosquito Lagoon, Charlotte Harbor, Pine Island Sound and the Everglades is the best bet.
	North Carolina	Virginia	Striped Bass: Stripers push south to escape dropping temperatures, taking up temporary residence around the mouth of Chesapeake Bay and along the Outer Banks. Boating anglers who pick the right weather windows should do well on live eels. Surf casters bottom-fishing with large cut bait will also catch some bass.
	Mexico	Florida	Swordfish: This is the time to find swords finning on top, sunning themselves off Mazatlan, Cabo San Lucas and Puerto Vallarta. In South Florida, swordfishing continues to receive 24-hour attention. Baiting with squid is still the best nighttime option, but live tinker mackerel, small bonito or mullet get the nod during the day.
	Florida	North Carolina	King Mackerel: Kingfish of all sizes congregate in South Florida waters along both coasts. Look for the larger smokers — fish over 50 pounds — off Key West. On North Carolina's Outer Banks, the kingfish bite remains steady. Catching big fish is still a possibility, but many will be moving on to the Sunshine State.
	North Carolina	Florida	Bluefish: Bluefish remain plentiful along the surf and offshore in the Outer Banks, but strong cold fronts will increasingly push fish to milder Florida waters. Most blues school up between Cape Canaveral and Fort Pierce, but if temperatures drop below average, some will keep going south, all the way to Key West.
	Mexico	Hawaii	Dolphin: The dolphin bite off Mexico's west coast jumps to the forefront again, as big dorado join the party up and down Baja's offshore fishing grounds. In Hawaii, anglers fishing off Kona enjoy a major influx of dolphin this month. A series of FADs placed along the island's lee side will attract numerous fish over 30 pounds.

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Bay Anchovy



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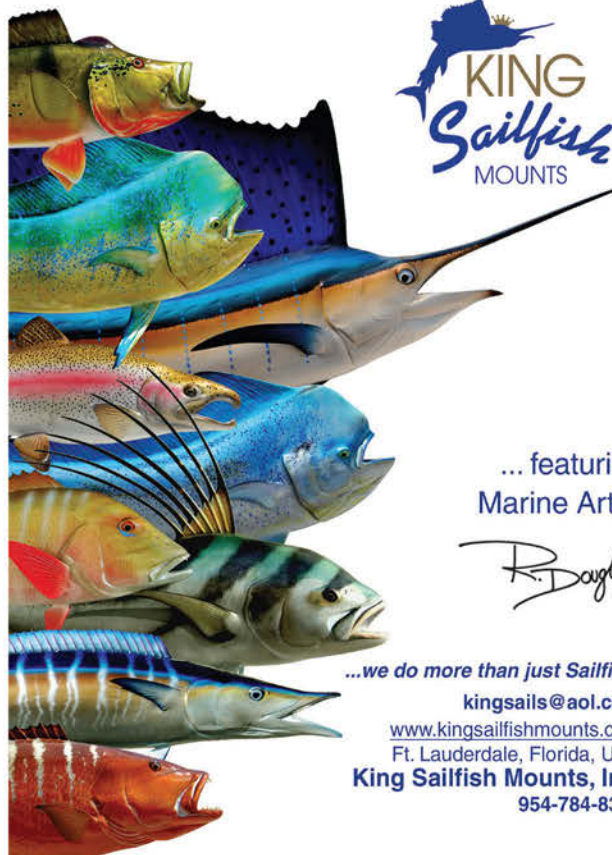


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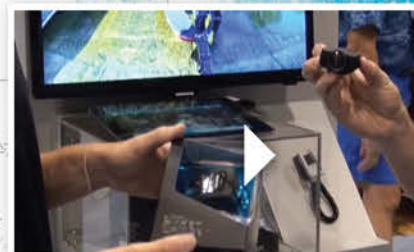


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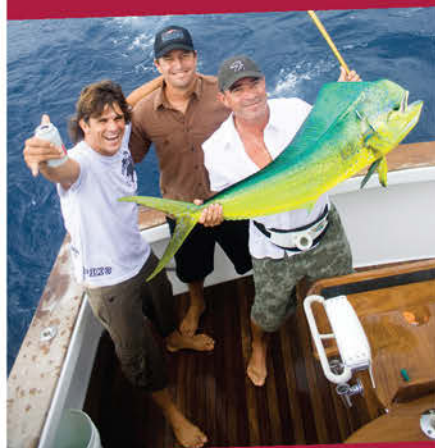
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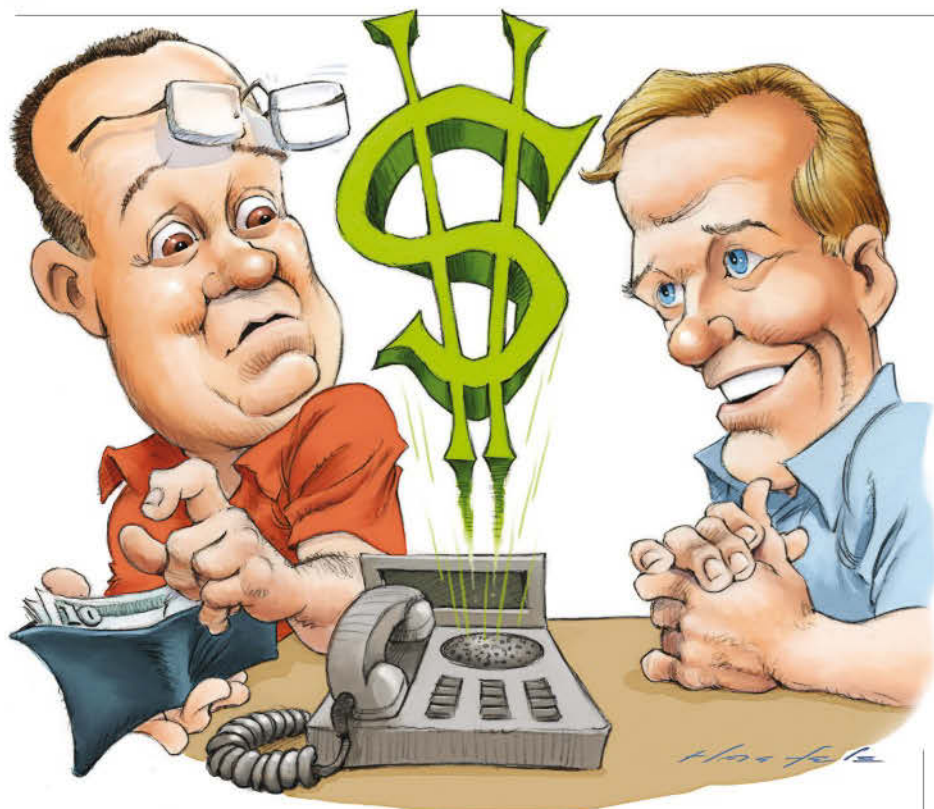
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If You Have to Ask ...

A gift of art can prove costly.

BY DOUG PIKE

Back in my single-guy-at-banquets, outdoors-art-collecting days, I bought pieces by all of the best Southern brushes in the business: Cowan, Dearman, McDonald, Barnes, Kocian, Caldwell and others. I ran out of wall space before I ran out of money and soon wondered how I'd ever make sense of all the purchases.

At the time, I was editor of *Tide*, the Coastal Conservation Association's magazine. There, a young friend who had way more hair and less money than he does now asked me if I could suggest a holiday gift for his outdoors-loving father. I mentioned my prints, and he liked the idea. He even wanted a second piece to decorate the home he shared with his new bride. We met at

my place, where he thumbed through the unframed pieces and selected a pair. Neither of us knew their actual value, but we agreed that he'd pay me fair-market price, less 30 percent. Win-win.

A month or so after Christmas, I reminded him gently that we needed to square up on that art. "Of course," he replied, and, "So sorry for the delay." His surgeon father loved the print, which already had been framed and hung. Neither of us ever bothered to check the value of the prints over all those weeks. We were too busy with our jobs of protecting marine resources from overfishing and making sure the magazine's contributors sent their copy on time. "We'll call Butch," I said, referencing Butch Kissman, who was

then, and still is, a respected art dealer in Houston. "He'll know."

The young conservationist — who shall remain unnamed because I don't want to embarrass the guy — and I met in my office that afternoon. I put the phone on speaker and dialed Butch's number. He answered, and I outlined our situation.

"I've probably got a buck-fifty in one of them and maybe a couple hundred in the other," I said. "Told him I'd take current market value less about 30 percent. What are they worth?"

If memory serves, the first of the two pieces was a flats-fishing scene, tarpon or maybe bonefish. Maybe it was redbfish. Whatever the fish were, they and the paper on which they were printed were worth a little more than I'd paid. Minus the promised discount, that transaction was more or less a wash. My friend was happy, and I, at least, didn't lose any money on that transaction.

"What's the other one?" Kissman asked. "A Cowan," I replied. "*Windmill Whitetails*." Then came a pause. "You there, Butch?" I asked. "Yeah, is he sitting down? How good of a friend is he?" inquired Kissman. He was a good friend — and still would be if we bumped into each other more often — but neither of us expected the number we heard next, which was a lot closer to \$1,000 than to a couple of hundred.

Stunned, we hung up and were unable to say much for a minute or two. Ultimately, I agreed to take far less than originally discussed. My friend said he would talk to his dad, who stepped up and absorbed the portion that went beyond my colleague's wallet.

I recently checked the Internet for prices on that print. Galleries that actually have one in stock instruct online visitors to write or call for a quote. As the old adage goes: If you have to ask the price, well, you know ... My friend did well with that print and with his career at CCA. I probably spent the money on fishing tackle. Again, win-win. 🍷

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